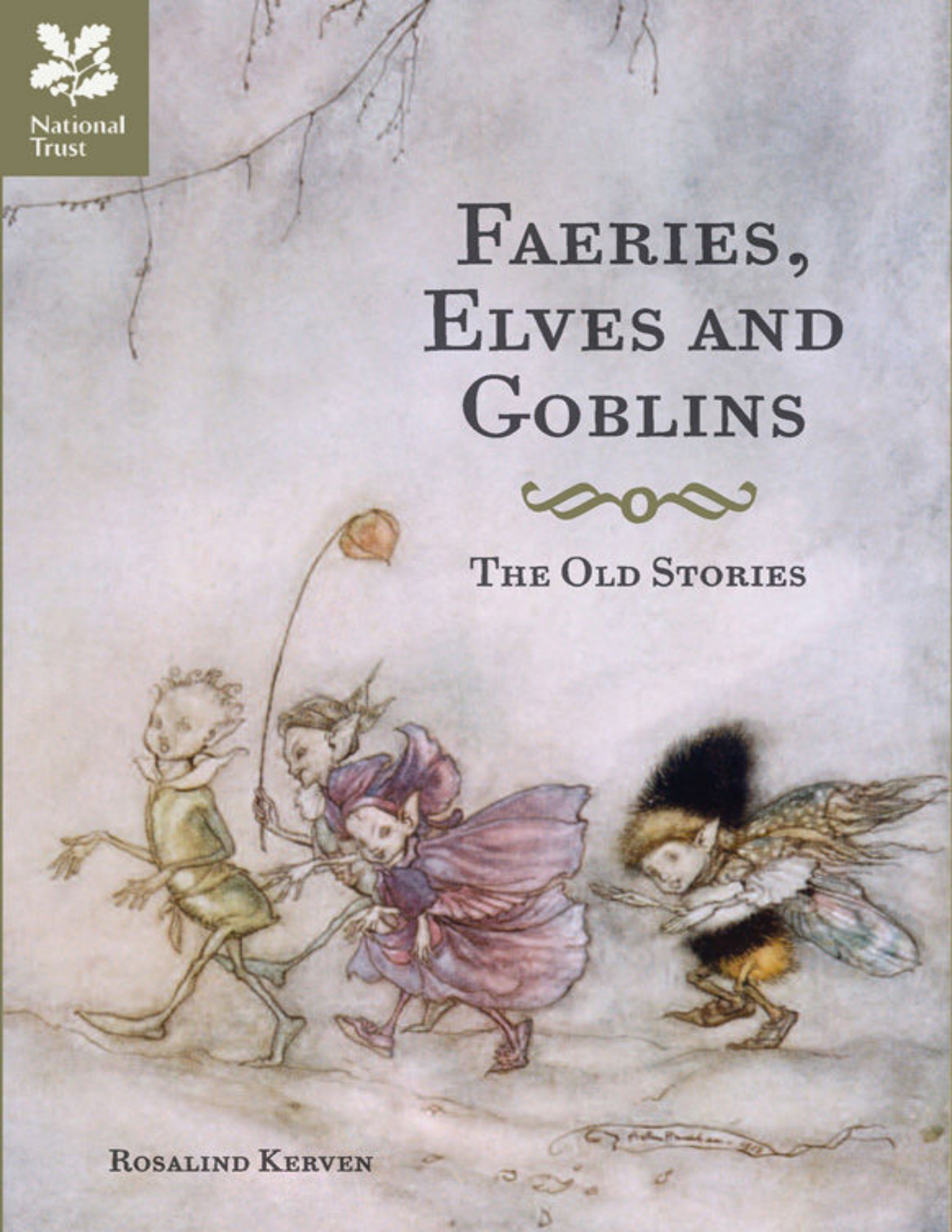
National Trust

Faeries, Elves and Goblins

The Old Stories



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Faeries, Elves & Goblins

In this collection of traditional tales, bestselling author Rosalind Kerven pesents 25 stories which bring the British folklore heritage vividly to life, weaving together mystical tales of faery royalty, mischievous goblins, helpful house elves, changelings and enchantments from across Britain and Ireland.

The tales are interspersed with spotlight features on faery folklore, including faery morals, the carious faery tribes, spells and dealings between faeries and mortals. There are also fascinating quotes drawn from medieval manuscripts and oral folklore. Each story is attributed to a particular region and accompanied by detailed notes.

With charming illustrations from favortie classic illustrators throughout, including Athur Rackham, this book reminds us of the enduring appeal of folklore for all generations.

Rosalind Kerven has written over 60 highly acclaimed books, many of which have been translated into numerous languages. She is the author of *English Fairy Tales and Legends* and *Arthurian Legends*, both published by the National Trust.

Other books of traditional stories by Rosalind Kerven:

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Faeries, Elves & Goblins
The Old Stories

ROSALIND KERVEN

National Trust

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'In th’olde days...
Al was this land fulfild of Fayerye,
The Elf-queen, with hir joly companye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede'

– Geoffrey Chaucer, England, 14th Century

Note

‘Faery’ and ‘Elf’ are interchangeable terms:
both refer to the full range of spirits described in this book.

‘Goblin’ is usually taken to refer to the more
malevolent Faery races.
For brevity, **‘Faery’** is used here for all general discussion.

A universal quality of Faeries is that they are immortal,
death being unknown to them.
Thus in stories about Faeries it is traditional
to refer to normal human beings as **‘Mortals’**.

Of Faeries, Elves and Goblins

There was in every hollow
A hundred wry-mouthed Elves.

– Davydd ab Gwilym, Wales, fourteenth century

You may call them Good People, Strangers, The Gentry, Honest Folk, People of Peace, Tiddy Ones, Mother's Blessings, Them That's In or simply Themselves; but never speak their true names.

They are older than history and bittersweet as memories. They dwell under the ground, inside the hill, through the passage, beneath the water and beyond the mist.

They are both male and female, young and old. They are all immortal. They may grow tall as kings or stay small as sucklings. They are of the earth yet unearthly. Some are beautiful, angelic and light as gossamer; others are wizened, moth-eaten, prickly and old. They dress in caps and feathers, breeches and gowns: green, red, white or the colours of dust. They spin and weave, bake bread, work metal. Their music is like honey spiked with sorrow.

They are passionate, vengeful and cunning, yet neither good nor evil. They are secretive and sly, creators of illusion, shape-shifters. They fly with a magic cap or powerful words, astride twigs and stems, or dizzily on gusts of wind. They can fade, turn invisible and vanish.

Hob Thrush

· *England* ·

Hob Thrush

There was once a woman who had so much housework to do that she wished there were twice as many hours in the day. Her husband was a busy man too, and truth to tell it was mostly his fault that the woman was so overloaded. For every evening he came home from the fields covered in mud, which he dropped all over their little cottage, so that she had to sweep and scrub for ages to get rid of it. Moreover, they had a large brood of hungry, scampish children, so there were endless clothes to launder and darn; not to mention meals to cook and clear away. Of course, the woman loved her family dearly, but she couldn't help being constantly tired and irritable.

One fine spring morning she got up at dawn to make an early start on her never-ending chores. A thrush was singing merrily in the lilac tree outside the front door, so she allowed herself a moment's indulgence to step outside and hear it. 'Thank you, bird,' she said. 'What a pity there's no time to listen any longer.' And with a sigh she went back into the kitchen, to start her work.

But what a surprise awaited her, for the kitchen was already spic and span! The flagstone floor was clean enough to eat off; the children's toys and books were neatly stacked in a corner, the mats were shaken out; the dirty clothes had been washed, dried, ironed and folded; the fire was already lit and the kettle on the range was coming up to the boil; the brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece had been polished until they gleamed; and to top it all, the table was laid for breakfast with a large loaf of fresh-baked bread and a big pat of newly churned butter.

The woman's eyes almost popped out of her head. Just then, her husband came down to join her. 'Did you do this?' she cried. 'Oh, how kind you are to help me!'

But her husband shook his head in bewilderment. ‘No, it wasn’t me. You know I couldn’t get the house in order however hard I tried.’

‘Then one of the neighbours must have taken pity on me,’ said the woman thoughtfully. ‘I wonder who? Now I feel bad about always grumbling, because they’ve all got more than enough work of their own.’

After breakfast, she popped round all the other cottages in the village to find out who her benefactor was. But no one owned up. ‘I’m almost as busy as you,’ each one insisted. ‘Much as I’d like to help you, I’m afraid I just don’t have time.’ Then, as the woman turned to go, each neighbour made exactly the same suggestion: ‘Have you thought: it might not be a person at all? It might be a Hob or a Brownie – a house Faery.’

The woman went home and told her husband and children what the neighbours had said. They were all very excited! Since the woman had heard a thrush singing just before she first discovered his handiwork, they decided to call their mysterious helper ‘Hob Thrush’. Then they all agreed – even the children – to be on their best behaviour and not to interfere.

That night the woman went to bed in a state of nervous anticipation; and the next morning she was rewarded with another sparkling clean kitchen. And so it went on, day after day.

Mindful that house Faeries expect a high standard of behaviour from the people they help, the woman was careful never to take advantage of Hob Thrush. She continued to work as hard as ever. The only difference was that now she was able to do certain things that she hadn’t had time for before, like baking cakes and making jam; and she could rest in bed easy in her mind, knowing that whatever she hadn’t been able to get through that day would be finished perfectly overnight.

She felt great affection for the invisible Hob who had made her life so much happier. To show her gratitude, she always left out a treat for him before she went to bed – a glass of milk or elderberry wine, and a good slice of fruitcake or a dish of mashed potatoes. To her delight, it was always gone when she came downstairs in the morning.

Of course, the children were desperate to know what Hob Thrush looked like, but they resisted the temptation to spy. Then one night, the woman’s husband was called out by a friend to help him with a sick cow, and by the time he got home it was well after midnight. As he crept upstairs, he heard noises coming from behind the kitchen door: someone singing, and a soft

scraping and rattling. Peeping through the keyhole, at last he saw Hob Thrush.

He was just as they had imagined: a tiny, tiny man with a wizened face and shining, berry-dark eyes. He had pulled all the plates off the dresser and was busy polishing the wood behind them – now that was something the woman never had time to do! There was a big grin on his face and a dance in his movements. But one thing shocked the husband, and that was Hob Thrush's clothes. His green jacket, breeches and hat were all worn almost to tatters, and his stockings and shoes were full of holes.

The husband leaped upstairs, woke his wife and told her what he had seen.

'Aha!' she cried, 'now I know exactly how we can say a proper "thank you" to Hob Thrush. I'll make him a brand new suit, fit for a prince!'

The next day she rushed through her chores, leaving only a few odds and ends for the Hob to finish. Then she fetched her bag of scraps and sewing basket and started stitching him a beautiful brown velvet jacket and matching breeches, with a scarlet felt cap and some green knitted stockings. It took her all week. As soon as they were finished, she laid the clothes out beside her nightly offering of wine and cake and went to bed so excited she could scarcely get to sleep.

In the morning the clothes were gone, but the wine and cake were untouched.

And, sad to say, the family never had any help from Hob Thrush again.

Midwife to the Faeries

· *Wales* ·

Midwife to the Faeries

On a farm in a quiet green valley, there lived an old woman and an old man called Bet and Huw, with no one to keep them company except for a flighty young serving maid called Elin. This Elin was a terrible dreamer, and she was always coming up with daft ideas. One evening, she took it into her head to leave a dish of bread and milk, and a big bowl of warm water on the kitchen hearth. In the morning, just as she had hoped, the bread and milk had gone, the water had been poured away; and on the table there was a bright gold coin.

'Look!' she cried to her mistress, 'The Faeries came in here while we were asleep: they ate the supper I left out for them and bathed their babies in the bowl! They'll be our friends for ever now!'

Bet and Huw were furious and forbade her to tempt the Faeries into the house again. But the foolish maid didn't care, for she knew that the fields down by the river were full of their dancing rings. The next night, as soon as her work was done, she went down there to watch for them.

Very soon the evening mist came rising from the ground; and with it came the Faery dancers, weaving and swaying into twisting lines and circles, twirling their white robes about and tossing their long hair. Behind them, all in step, marched a little band of fiddlers and pipers, playing the strangest, sweetest music.

They saw Elin at once and swept her up with them, laughing and singing as they spun her round. The stars moved far across the sky while they danced, until she was too exhausted to take another step. Then they laid her gently onto the dewy grass and left her there to sleep.

Old Bet had spied upon her from the farmhouse and seen everything that had happened.

‘You fool!’ she scolded. ‘Haven’t you heard how the Faeries steal away young girls they take a fancy to?’

Elin just tossed her head. ‘That’s nonsense! I’m not scared.’

‘Those who have dealings with the Faeries,’ said Old Bet darkly, ‘should use magic charms to stop them from getting too close. By day you should always carry something metal: a knife would do just nicely; one small enough to fit into your pocket. And by night you should sleep with a branch from the rowan tree laid across your bed. Metal and rowan wood are two things the Faeries cannot abide; they will not touch you while you have them.’

‘Maybe ...’ said Elin. But she had a faraway look in her eyes.

Time passed. One morning Old Bet and Old Huw got up late. There was no sign of Elin, so they cooked their own breakfast and cleared away the dishes themselves. Still the maid didn’t appear. So Bet went up to the little attic bedroom where the girl slept, thinking maybe she was ill, and gave a loud knock upon the door. When no answer came, she flung it wide open.

Well, what a shock she got! The bed was cold and empty, and the rowan branch, intended for protection, was tossed carelessly into the corner on the floor. Old Bet took one look; then she hurried downstairs again, shouting to Huw at the top of her voice: ‘Oh what a carry-on, oh what a to-do! Lord have mercy on that foolish girl – she’s got herself stolen away by the Faeries!’

A year and a day later, there was a terrible storm. Rain bucketed down, the wind roared and lightning flashed as if the very sky were on fire. There was a great clap of thunder, and as it died down a loud, urgent knocking rattled the door. Old Huw went to open it.

There on the step stood a Faery man! His skin and his thick, curly hair were both pale as moonlight, and he was no taller than a very young child. ‘You’d best come in for a bit of shelter,’ Huw offered uncertainly.

But the Faery man shook his head. ‘It’s your wife I want,’ he said.

Old Bet came bustling out to see what was going on.

‘Come with me,’ said the Faery man. Without waiting for an answer, he grabbed her arm and pulled her after him into the night.

Just round the corner, a silvery horse was waiting. The Faery man hoisted Old Bet up onto its back, then jumped up behind her. The horse began to

gallop through the storm so fast, that Bet felt as if she were flying. Shapes and shadows flashed past on either side, but she had no idea where they were going.

At last the horse slowed and they began to ascend a narrow path that wound steeply into the mountains. This ended at a hard rock face, which suddenly gaped open like a gate as they reached it and admitted them into a long tunnel. Gradually, it broadened out into an enormous, gloomy cave, full of shadows and cobwebs.

The craggy walls were dripping with damp and crusted with moss. The only warmth came from a smoking fire in a rusty grate. Old Bet gazed around in wonder and horror. This must surely be Faeryland! But what a disappointment – it was nothing like she had imagined.

The Faery man dismounted from his horse and disappeared into the gloom. Bet slipped down too – and suddenly heard a loud groan coming from a murky corner. She crept towards it and saw a rough bed formed from hacked-off branches and dead bracken. An unkempt girl in a raggedy dress was lying on it, writhing with the pains of childbirth. As she got closer, Old Bet almost jumped out of her skin; for who should the girl be but *Elin*!

It only took a moment for Old Bet to get over her dismay, for there was clearly no time to waste! Fortunately she had given birth to seven babies of her own, and had also helped many other women in the family way. She leaned over, patted the girl's cheek reassuringly, stoked up the fire, found a cauldron of water and put it to heat on the flames. No sooner was everything ready, than a tiny, exquisitely beautiful, snow-pale baby boy came into the world. Old Bet had him cleaned up and lying in Elin's arms in no time, with the ramshackle bed made comfortable and neat again.

'Well!' gasped Old Bet when everything was done. 'Thank goodness you're still alive, my dear, though I can't bear to think what happened to bring you to this shameful state. Whoever is that nasty little man? Don't tell me that this child is *his*?'

'Yes, Mistress,' said Elin, with her old mischievous smile. 'But don't worry, everything's right and proper. In case you hadn't realised, he's the Faery King! He's married me and made me his Queen! Aren't I lucky? And isn't our palace wonderful?'

'Oh dear,' thought Old Bet, 'she's gone completely soft in the head! But I'll have to make the best of things and just get on with it. I suppose this so-

called ‘King’ has brought me here to help Elin recover and teach her how to look after the baby.’

So she heated more water and gave the baby a bath, then showed Elin how to nurse him, rock him to sleep and lay him gently in the rough, oaken cradle that stood beside the bed.

After a while, she heard footsteps behind her. Turning, she saw the Faery King, holding a small silver pot. He lifted the lid to reveal a curious, bright-green ointment, which he put into Bet’s hands.

‘In future, each time you bathe my son, rub this into his eyes,’ he said. Then he frowned at her. ‘But make sure none gets anywhere near your own eyes, woman, for it contains the strongest kind of magic.’

Old Bet did as she was told, though she wasn’t really interested in petty rules. She stayed in the cave for many days, caring for Elin and her Faery child; but also watching carefully for a chance to find out what this ‘magic’ was for. At last, when there was no sign of the Faery King and Elin was fast asleep, Old Bet opened the pot and smeared a little ointment into one of her own eyes.

What a marvel, what a change!

At once she saw the squalid cave transform into a vast, magnificent palace! It had white marble floors, silken drapes and furniture fashioned from pure gold. The air was fragrant with flowers and echoed with exquisite music. Beyond arched windows, Old Bet glimpsed rolling meadows and sparkling waterfalls. As for Elin, her filthy rags had turned into fine, silken robes, and a silver crown lay beside her on a plump feather bed.

Old Bet stared and pinched herself; but still the wonderful vision shone bright. Yet this was the strangest thing of all: when she shut the eye with the magic ointment in it and just looked out of the other eye, the gloomy cave and everything in it appeared exactly as before.

Now Old Bet understood that, to those who had the magic sight, Faeryland was indeed a glorious place. Yet she dared not talk about it, not even to Elin; for she knew the Faery King would be furious if he discovered she had disobeyed him.

‘So before that happens,’she thought, ‘I’d better be on my way home.’

She told Elin she had to leave because Old Huw would be worrying about her; and no sooner had she spoken than the Faery King appeared again. This time, thanks to her magicky eye, Old Bet could see him in his true form, and he was indeed both noble and very handsome.

‘You have taken good care of my Queen and our baby,’ he said solemnly. ‘Here is my silver horse to carry you home, laden with two big packs: a gift from the Faery People to you. But do not open them until you arrive, or everything they contain will disappear.’

You can imagine how glad Old Huw was when his wife arrived home safe and sound. At first he found it hard to believe what she described of her adventure. However, when they opened the bags the King had given her, and found them full to the brim with Faery gold, he quickly realised it was all true.

Old Bet was greatly relieved to be home; yet she found it difficult to settle down. For she was still greatly bothered by the magicky sight in one of her eyes. It made her see Faeries and their bits and bobs of magic everywhere: glittering in the cupboards, flickering through the cornfield, laughing and darting before her whenever she went for a walk. She felt all shivery and peculiar about it, but she had no idea how to put things right.

Things went on uncomfortably like this until the Midwinter Fair. Amongst the bustling crowds and brightly coloured stalls, Old Bet suddenly saw a great procession of Faeries! They were dancing and piping two by two; yet it seemed they were totally invisible to everyone else. Right in their midst, riding their silvery horses, she spotted the Faery King and Queen Elin. Excitedly, she pushed her way through, grabbed Elin’s hand and cried: ‘How are you my dear? And how’s your little boy?’

Elin’s hand flew to her mouth and she gasped.

‘Old woman,’ said the Faery King icily, ‘which eye do you see us with?’

‘This one,’ said Old Bet said. ‘But I didn’t ...’

The Faery King leaned forward, blew softly onto Bet’s magicky eye … and in a flash, all the Faeries disappeared.

After that, not only did Old Bet never see the Faeries again, but she completely lost the sight of the magicky eye. But she never stopped talking about her adventure, right to the end of her days.

The Bogie’s Field

· *England* ·

The Bogie's Field

A farmer was once plagued by a really annoying type of Goblin, a Bogie, who constantly helped himself to the farmer's crops.

'He's a devious little rascal,' the farmer grumbled to his friends. 'Always hanging around, like a fly buzzing about your head. I've tried endless times to swat him, but each time he manages to slip past me. There's nothing for it: I'll have to think of a clever trick to outwit him.'

One morning, the Bogie came dancing onto the farmer's field, just as he was about to start ploughing it.

'This is *my* field, farmer,' the Bogie taunted him. 'And you're my slave! Everything you grow here, you have to give to me.'

'Is that right?' said the farmer, scratching his head and pretending to look bewildered. 'Hmm … I may be your slave, but I still need a share of the crop so that I can eat. Otherwise I'll have no strength to work for you next year – and then what will you do?'

The Bogie hopped round in circles for a few moments. Then he said grudgingly, 'Hmm … I suppose there's sense in that. But how shall we divide it up to make sure that I get the master's share?'

'Why don't we each take either all the bottoms or all the tops of the entire crop?' said the farmer. 'You can choose which you want, to be sure you get the best part.'

The Bogie shook his spindly limbs to and fro and sucked his waxy thumb. 'You can't get the better of me, farmer,' he said. 'You think I'm going to choose "tops", don't you, because that sounds like the top share; but I bet it isn't. To spite you, I'll have the bottoms.'

'Quite sure?' asked the farmer.

‘Stop trying to make me change my mind!’ the Bogie snapped.

They shook hands on the deal. Then the farmer bought some seeds and planted them, and when they came up he had a field full of wheat. The Bogie didn’t lift a finger to help, not even with the harvest. However, when it was all finished, he came knocking on the farmer’s door with an outstretched hand.

‘Ah, good morning to you, sir!’ said the farmer. ‘I’ve got your share of the harvest. The “bottoms” you asked for are all packed up and ready for you.’

He handed the Bogie a pile of sacks, each one crammed full with the ‘bottom’ of his harvest – which of course comprised only roots and stubble. Now, all the Faery tribes are honour bound to keep a bargain, so the Bogie had to take them. Even so, he was furious when he saw the farmer filling his stores with all the grain from the ‘top’ of the crop.

The months spun round and soon it was spring and time for planting again. Just as the farmer had finished ploughing and was setting off for town to buy his seeds, the Bogie appeared before him.

‘Remember our bargain, you slavering slave!’ he screeched at the farmer. ‘I’m having the top part of the crop this year, oh yes, the *best* bit!’

‘If it’s “tops” you want, then “tops” you shall have, sir,’ said the farmer. And he shook hands solemnly with the Bogie.

Then he bought himself a sack of turnip seeds and scattered them over the ground. Soon the turnips came up with their big green leaves, and just as last year, the Bogie didn’t do a single thing to help tend the crop or harvest it. But again, as soon as all the work was finished, there he was on the farmer’s doorstep, shrieking, ‘I’ve come for my share, podgy pants! Remember, this time, I’m having the top bit!’

‘Of course, sir,’ said the farmer politely. And he handed the Bogie several sacks full of dried, withered turnip leaves.

What could the Bogie do but accept them? But you should have seen his face as he watched the wily farmer stowing his barn with the ‘bottom’ of his crop – piles of fat, juicy turnips!

The very next day the Bogie was back. ‘I’m fed up with your cheating,’ he cried. ‘Next year we’re having different terms. You’ve got to grow wheat. When it’s ripe we’ll divide the field equally into two and have a mowing match. Whoever completes his half first will keep the whole harvest.’

The farmer answered solemnly, ‘Agreed.’

The following spring saw the farmer hard at work in his field as usual, while the Bogie loitered around him, yelling snide comments and generally making a nuisance of himself. When the shoots were coming up nicely and the weeding was under control, the farmer excused himself and popped into town to see the blacksmith. He hung around for a couple of days while the smith made him hundreds of thin iron rods. He carried these home in his cart and stuck them into the soil, here and there, all over the Bogie’s half of the field.

‘What are you doing, slave?’ the Bogie demanded.

‘Oh, it’s a new-fangled way of fertilising the crops to get a better yield,’ the farmer told him.

‘Then keep at it,’ the Bogie ordered.

Soon the wheat was ready to harvest. The farmer and the Bogie each took a sharp scythe and stood at the top of his chosen section of the field.

‘Say when you’re ready, master,’ said the farmer.

‘Go!’ the Bogie shouted – so suddenly and loudly that the poor farmer jumped out of his skin.

‘Ha, ha,’ the Bogie sniggered. ‘I’ve got a head start on you!’

Sure enough, he was already moving down his section by the time the farmer started swinging his scythe. But very soon, the Bogie’s scythe hit one of the iron rods with a great clang!

‘Stinking middens!’ swore the Bogie. ‘What’s that?’

The farmer said nothing but carried on mowing. The Bogie carried on too. But it wasn’t long before he hit another iron rod. And then another, and another. And so on, until his scythe was so blunt that he had to slash through each bundle of wheat at least five times before the blade cut through it. Thus the Bogie had not completed even a quarter of his section by the time the farmer had triumphantly finished his.

‘You bamboozling double dealer!’ shrieked the Bogie. ‘To punish you, I shan’t let you be my slave any more!’ He spun round, kicking out his legs and hissing like a snake, then took a gigantic leap right into thin air.

After that, the farmer never had any more trouble from him.

Edain and Midhir

· *Ireland* ·

Edain and Midhir

Long ago, when magic still ran freely in the world, there lived a princess called Edain. Since she was blessed with the most extraordinary grace and beauty, it was not long before two great men lost their hearts to her. One was King Eochaid, ruler of a neighbouring land; the other was King Midhir of the Tuatha de Danann – the noble race of Faeries.

Eochaid wasted no time in declaring his love. He courted Edain diligently and soon she returned his affection and agreed to become his Queen.

When news of this reached Midhir, he was smitten with anguish and rage. Not only had he lost the woman he craved, but even worse, his honour had been sullied by a Mortal.

Vowing vengeance, he at once disguised himself as a Mortal traveller, hastened to Eochaid's palace and requested lodgings there for the night. Eochaid, having no idea that his unexpected guest was a rival, offered bountiful hospitality in accordance with local custom, satiating Midhir with fine feasting and wine. At the end of the evening they exchanged vows of friendship and, as the fire mellowed to glowing embers, Midhir suggested a game of chess.

'An excellent idea!' said Eochaid. 'What stakes shall we play for?'

'Why not let the winner choose?' said Midhir. 'After the game is finished, the loser must give him whatever he wants.'

Eochaid readily agreed. He won the first game, and demanded a set of horses as his prize. Midhir bowed, withdrew and made the payment promptly.

'How about a return game on the same terms?' he offered.

Again, Eochaid agreed. Though they seemed evenly matched, he won the second game too. This time he demanded a hoard of treasure, which Midhir readily supplied.

Then they played a final game, and this time Midhir was the victor.

Eochaid congratulated him heartily, asking, ‘What prize do you wish to claim?’

‘Your wife,’ said Midhir.

Eochaid looked at him through narrowed eyes. ‘That is outrageous!’ he cried. ‘I refuse to let you have her.’

‘We agreed at the outset that the loser would pay the winner whatever he asked for,’ said Midhir smoothly. ‘You won twice, Eochaid, and twice I granted your wish. Besides, in truth Edain is rightfully mine.’

Then he revealed who he really was, and confounded Eochaid by spinning an extraordinary tale.

‘I am King of the Tuatha de Danann,’ he said. ‘Yes, I thought that would surprise you! You had better consider things more carefully before you dare oppose me any further, eh?’

Eochaid said nothing. Midhir went on: ‘I should explain that my love life is somewhat complex, Eochaid, for I have been married twice. I didn’t get on with my first wife, Fuamnach – she was a scheming shrew. So I discarded her and wedded Edain instead.’

‘You liar!’ cried Eochaid. ‘Edain was a chaste maid when first I met her.’

‘No, no, that was just an illusion,’ said Midhir, ‘as you will understand when my tale is done. You see, Fuamnach was so bitter at my infidelity, that she sought help from an enchanter to wreak her revenge. He wove spells faster and stronger than even I could conjure, and before I could stop him, he transformed my fair Edain into a worthless insect – a fly! Then he called up a storm-wind that blasted her out of the Faery Realms and into the Mortal wastelands.

‘For seven wretched years this wind blew my love about ceaselessly hither and thither. Finally it wafted her into the hall of another Mortal king. There she sought refuge in the rafters; but she was so weary from her long ordeal, that she lost her hold and tumbled down into a golden cup of wine. In this way she was swallowed, unnoticed, by the king’s wife. Nine months later, Edain was reborn to this queen as an infant girl, and her parents unwittingly bestowed the same name upon her. She grew up to be even

more beautiful than in her previous life; but before I could take her back, *you* brazenly pushed your way in and married her.

'That, Eochaid, is the truth about the woman you dare to call your wife. She was mine first! I order you to give her back to me, as my reward for winning this game.'

'Never!' said Eochaid. 'Edain loves me as I love her, and I will fight you to the death to defend her.'

'Only *your* death is possible, you fool,' Midhir reminded him. 'You can never kill me, for I am immortal.'

Eochaid argued long with Midhir, refusing to submit to despair. In the end he extracted from the Faery this promise: that he would not take Edain away for another year and a day.

The time went quickly. When it was over, Eochaid stationed a thousand mighty warriors around his palace and guarded the gate himself in full armour, sword drawn. He waited from sunrise until midnight. But Midhir did not come.

So he called his warriors inside and barred the doors. Then he sat with Edain beside him at the centre of a celebratory feast.

As they ate, drank and made merry with their warriors, a travelling bard arrived and began to entertain them with his golden harp. He plucked the strings with sweet melancholy, the notes weaving in and out of the long night as if it had no end, accompanied by a song of love and longing. All the warriors were deeply stirred by it, and tears came brimming into Edain's eyes. Gradually, soothed by the music, all the men rested their heads on the table and sank, one by one, into an unnatural sleep.

King Eochaid was the last to succumb. When he too began to snore, the bard sealed his lips, laid down his harp and went to Edain.

She alone was not slumbering, though her eyes were dreamy and glazed. She rose, as in a trance, and did not resist when the bard wound his arm softly round her waist and led her to the locked doors, which melted like mist to let them through.

Outside, the bard uttered a clutch of incantations. For a brief instant he shimmered in his true shape as Midhir. Then he and Edain were both transformed into snow-white swans, joined by a golden chain. In this form they flew away together into the night.

When Eochaid finally awoke and found that Edain had been snatched away, his sorrow was beyond words. But soon it hardened into anger. He sent messengers to every king in Ireland who might be sympathetic to his cause and urged them to join him. Eager to prove their superiority to the Tuatha de Danann, they assembled an army of enormous size, spreading rapidly over the hills to hunt for Faery raths, which they dug out and burned without mercy. But they did not find Midhir's lair.

So Eochaid called upon the druids to help by casting spells. Thus at last Midhir and Edain were located, hidden in an enchanted fortress deep in the heart of the earth.

Eochaid led his warriors to the spot and surrounded it on all sides. Then, with his own hands, he dug down and down through the soil, until he stood before the underground fortress gates.

They swung open at his touch. He stepped through them into an eerie hall swarming with shadows that drifted within the darkness, rolling towards him like fog then slowly dissolving. Beyond them Eochaid saw three-score noble ladies, all imbued with impossible fragrance and loveliness; and each with the face of Edain.

King Midhir came striding through them. 'So,' he mocked, 'you are the true lover of Edain, eh? Come then, Eochaid, claim her from amongst my phantoms! I give you a single chance to point to her – but if you make the wrong choice, she will stay in my power for ever.'

Eochaid stared hopelessly at the identical figures, all so immobile and expressionless. Was the real Edain truly amongst them? How could he possibly pick her out?

And then suddenly he knew. She did not move. She made no sound. But her eyes returned his gaze with adoring love. He stepped forward and touched her.

At once the other spectres faded away like remnants of a nightmare.

Midhir roared and froze.

Eochaid seized Edain's hand. Midhir was powerless to stop them. They ascended from the subterranean Faery Realms and burst into the sunlight. As they galloped away, the hills echoed with people cheering their triumph over the Tuatha de Danann.

And after that Edain and Eochaid lived together in peace and great joy for many years.

Midhir's inglorious loss weakened the Tuatha de Danann beyond repair. Their strongholds crumbled, their magic withered and their realm fell into ruin. And so it was that the noble Faeries of ancient Ireland were never seen again.

Fair woman, will you go with me to a wonderful land where music is? ... Sweet mild streams flow through the land, choice mead and wine; matchless people without blemish, conception without sin, without guilt ... Woman, if you come to my mighty people a crown of gold shall be on your head.

–From *Midhir's Invitation to the Earthly Paradise*.
Anonymous, Ireland, ninth century

Whuppity Stoorie

· *Scotland* ·

Whuppity Stoorie

There was once a woman whose husband ran off, leaving her with a newborn baby at her breast, and only a pregnant sow to offer any hope of earning a little cash. To be honest, the husband was such a good-for-nothing brute, the woman was glad to see the back of him, and she managed to keep her spirits up quite well. However, one morning, when she took a pail of swill into the pigsty, she found the sow lying flat on its back, panting and groaning, clearly at death's door.

That was the final straw! The poor woman dumped the pail on the ground and burst into tears.

Her little one started bawling for his feed, so she dried her eyes quickly and turned to go inside. But as she put her hand on the door, the baby suddenly fell silent, and footsteps sounded behind her. She turned round, wondering who on earth it could be; for her cottage stood in a lonely spot, and she got few visitors. To her surprise, a very elegant lady, dressed from head to toe in vivid green, was stepping nimbly up the hill towards her, waving a long staff in greeting.

'Good morning to you, goodwife!' the lady called. 'I heard you wailing and weeping from afar, and came to see if I might help?'

'Oh, do please excuse me, ma'am!' cried the woman in a fluster, curtsying low and adding a blush to her face though it was already flushed with tears. 'I had no idea anyone was close enough to be disturbed. It's just that everything has gone wrong for me these past few weeks and I'm at the end of my tether.'

'Yes, yes,' said the green lady impatiently, gesturing that she should rise from her curtsy, and regarding the woman with shrewd, deep eyes. 'I know

about your bad luck. I could probably bring your husband back to you ... only I'm guessing you wouldn't want that?'

'Definitely not!' the woman agreed, shaking her head vigorously. 'He's the most useless wretch that ever walked the earth!'

'But what you would like,' said the green lady, 'is for me to cure your sick sow, eh? And then for it to give birth to a baker's dozen of piglets?'

'Oh, ma'am I would indeed! Can you really arrange such a thing? That's so kind of you!'

'Of course I can do it,' the green lady snapped. 'But stop this talk of "kindness". You don't expect me to help you for nothing, do you? What will you give me in payment?'

'Anything!' the woman cried. 'Well, that is, ma'am, I'm sure you realise that I don't have very much. But you only have to name what you want, and if I've got it, I'll give it to you.'

'Are you sure?' said the green lady.

'Sure as sure!' the woman nodded eagerly.

'Well, I don't want you changing your mind, so let's wet thumbs on it,' said the green lady.

She dipped her left thumb in the morning dew and so did the woman, and they pressed them together to seal the bargain. Then the green lady marched into the sty, took a little bottle from her skirts and sprinkled some green fluid on the sickly sow's snout, muttering:

Pitter, patter
Magic water.

Then she cried, 'Get up, pig!' At once the sow jumped to her feet with a loud snort and began greedily devouring her swill, her swollen belly quivering with the unborn piglets she was carrying.

The woman was delighted! She fell to her knees and began kissing the green lady's swirling skirts and velvet slippers. But the green lady hauled her to her feet.

'Now, now, there's no need to be subservient,' she scolded. 'All you have to do is keep your side of the bargain.'

'Of course,' the woman grovelled. 'Tell me what you want and I'll ...'

'Your baby,' the green lady said.

A chill ran through the woman's heart. But then she thought she must have misheard her: no true lady would ever make such an unreasonable demand.

‘Er ... did you say … I’m sure you didn’t mean ... Not my *baby*, ma’am?’ she whispered.

‘I meant exactly what I said,’ the green lady replied. ‘You promised to give me whatever I asked for. Since you don’t have any material goods of value, I’ll take your child instead.’

Now the woman’s blood turned to ice, as she knew for sure that the green lady was exactly what she seemed to be – a Faery! – and that it was no good trying to beg or bargain with her to change her mind. She let out a terrified shriek; but the Faery scolded her: ‘Be silent! You freely entered into this agreement without asking any questions, so you’ve no right to complain. However, it must be carried out according to the laws of my people, and that means that I can only take the child from you in three days’ time; and meanwhile you have the right to withdraw from the bargain if you can fulfil a certain condition.’

‘Oh, ma’am!’ cried the woman. ‘Can I really? What condition? What do I have to do?’

‘It will sound simple to ignorant ears such as yours,’ said the Faery, ‘but I can assure you it isn’t. All you have to do is tell me my correct name.’

Then she gathered her green skirts in a rustle of silk, turned, ran lightly down the hill – and vanished.

All that night the woman lay awake, tossing and turning, clutching her beloved baby close to her, going over every possible name she could think of, then rejecting it. She was terrified that, unless she managed to guess the right one, she really would lose her darling child for ever.

As soon as dawn broke, she was up and dressed and feeding him. Then she decided to step outside into the fresh air to clear her head, hoping that a walk might give her inspiration. She wrapped the baby in a warm shawl and carried him long and far, over hills and down valleys, in and out of forests, until they reached a disused, overgrown quarry that she had never seen before. Birds were singing sweetly, flitting amongst the briars and brambles; and amongst them she heard a strange whirring noise that she didn’t recognise. Wondering what species could be making the sound, she crept closer to the edge and peered down.

She saw that the whirring came from a spinning wheel, perched in the bottom of the quarry, and turning so quickly that the wheel itself was just a blur. Who should be sitting beside it, but the green Faery! She was tapping

her foot merrily as she worked the wheel; and then suddenly, amidst cackles of laughter, she burst into song:

She'll never guess, that foolish dame,
That Whuppity Stoorie is my name!

The woman could scarcely believe her luck. Fancy her random wanderings bringing her to the very spot that could save her baby! She jigged him gaily in her arms. Then, repeating the name over and over to herself, she danced all the way home. That night she slept better than she had ever done since her ill-fated marriage.

The morning after the morning after was the day when the Faery was due back for her payment. The woman got up with the lark, ready to meet the Faery on her own terms. 'For I've got the advantage now,' she said to herself. 'And I don't see why I shouldn't have a bit of fun, after all the torment that she's put me through.'

At the expected time, she went outside with her baby. She sat on the doorstep, rocking him in her arms and making a great show of weeping bitterly like last time. Sure enough, the green Faery soon came hurrying up the hill, waving her staff and shouting: 'Aha, there you are! Still feeling sorry for yourself, eh? Well, never mind, you know what I've come for. So hand him over.'

The woman, taking care to hide her smile, jumped to her feet, clasping the baby and wringing her hands. 'Oh, ma'am!' she cried, 'I beg you, please don't take him. Have the sow and all her piglets instead!'

'What nonsense!' scolded the Faery. 'A pig is no use to me at all. No, it's young human flesh and blood that I want. Hand him over at once.'

'Ooh, spare my little one and take me instead,' the woman pretended to beg.

'You?' the Faery cried. 'What would I want with a feeble creature like you?'

At this the woman pretended to weep anew. 'Oh dear, oh dear!' she moaned. 'I should have realised that I'm not good enough. No, a useless frump like me isn't even fit to tie the shoe-strings of the high and mighty WHUPPITY STOORIE!'

As soon as she heard her name, the Faery gave such a loud shriek that even the distant mountains trembled. Then she spun round and round and round until she was just a dazzle of twinkling light, and went rolling down the hill; and when she reached the bottom, she vanished into the woods.

The woman never saw the evil Faery again. Indeed, within moments she had almost forgotten about her. For just then a loud squealing came from the sty, and running in she found the sow had given birth to thirteen beautiful, fat piglets; and from that day on her fortunes completely changed for the better.

Sightings

My grandmother has often told me of Fairies dancing upon our green,
and they were little little creatures, clothed in green.
The moment any one saw them, and took notice of them,
they were struck blind of an eye.
They lived under ground, and generally came out of a mole-hill.
They had fine music always among themselves,
and danced in a moonshiny night around, or in a ring,
as one may see at this day upon every common in England,
where mushrooms grow.
– Dick Merryman, England, eighteenth century

You may see them or not see them, depending on their whims or whether you have the gift. Look for them at Hallowe'en or Midsummer, at dusk or midnight – or in the cold, secret hour before dawn. Seek them on mountain, hillside or peat bog; by river or thorn tree, in forest, cave, rockcleft or ruin. Perceive them unbidden in dusty corners of your own house. Hold them firmly in your gaze, for a single blink is enough to make them vanish.

A man and his family being all in bed, he being awake about midnight,
perceived by a light entering the little room where he lay,
and about a dozen in the shapes of men,
and two or three women with small children in their arms following,
they seemed to dance,
and the chamber appeared much wider and lighter than formerly ...
They continued there about four hours,
all which time he endeavoured to wake his wife but could not.
Afterwards they went into another room, and having
danced awhile departed.
– Robert Burton, Wales, seventeenth century

Not everyone believes their eyes. But for those who do, there have been many sightings, in many places. There was the Somerset girl, lost while picking primroses, who was led home by Faeries emerging from a door in a rock; and some Denbighshire schoolchildren who escaped over a stile when dancing Goblins chased after them. On the Isle of Muck, two boys saw some Faeries sailing away from a beach calling: 'Others of our race will come.'

Elidorus, a priest ... when a youth of twelve years ...
ran away, and concealed himself under the hollow bank of a river ...
[There] two little men of pigmy stature appeared to him, saying,
'If you will come with us, we will lead you into a country
full of delights and sports.'
Assenting and rising up, he followed his guides through a path,
at first subterraneous and dark, into a most beautiful country,
adorned with rivers and meadows, woods and plains,
but obscure, and not illuminated with the full light of the sun ...
These men were of the smallest stature ... very well proportioned ...
all of a fair complexion, with luxuriant hair falling over their shoulders ...
The boy frequently returned to our hemisphere ...
Being desired by [his mother] to bring a present ... he stole ... [a] golden ball
and when he reached the door of his father's house ...
his foot stumbled on the threshold,
and ... two pigmies seized the ball which had dropped from his hand,
and departed, shewing the boy every mark of contempt and derision ...
he returned by the usual track to the subterraneous road, but found no appearance of any passage,
though he searched for it on the banks of the river for nearly
the space of a year.
– Giraldus Cambrensis, Wales, twelfth century

But Faeries are not only for children's eyes: they are more often spied by sensible matrons and reputable middle aged men. A Galloway doctor, travelling a lonely road late at night, met a host of Faeries trooping towards him and nervously stood aside. 'Open up and let the honest doctor through!' one cried; and the procession parted in the middle, the Faeries bowing as he

passed. An elderly County Durham woman met a Faery sitting on a stone near her house: she took the creature in and fed her bread, butter and sugar, but she grew so miserable that the woman had to let her go. A Suffolk farmer, spying on the thieves who kept stealing wheat from his barn, discovered they were Faeries, so small that each could only carry out a single grain at a time.

The place near which they most ordinarily showed themselves was
on the side of a hill, named Black-down ... not many miles from Taunton.
Those that have had occasion to travel that way have frequently seen them,
appearing like men and women,
of a stature generally near the smaller size of men.
Their habits used to be of red, blue or green,
according to the old way of country garb, with high crowned hats.
– Richard Bovet, England, seventeenth century

Some folk glimpse Faeries in lonely places, like the Northumberland farmer lured by music at midnight to a hillside door that opened to reveal a Faery banquet inside. Others see them on their own home ground, like the Devon family who watched a Piskie sneak into their farmhouse one winter night, pull a clutch of hairs from his head and fling them onto the fire.

There was (as I have heard the story credibly reputed in this Country)
a man apprehended of suspition of Witchcraft,
he was of that sort we call white-witches, which are such as do
Cures beyond the Ordinary reasons and deducing of our usual Practitioners
What this man did was with a white powder,
which he said, he receiv'd from the Fayries,
and that going to a hill he knocked three times, and the hill opened,
and he had access to, and converse with, a visible people;
and offer'd, that if any Gentelman present
would either go himself in person,
or send his servant, he would conduct them thither,
and show them the place and persons from whence he had his skill.
– Durant Hotham, England, seventeenth century

Faeries relish secrecy, so those who are wise do not try to catch them or force them to reveal themselves against their will. Learn from the mistake of a Durham youth who rashly rode round a quarry haunted by Faeries: on his ninth circuit, they swarmed out to attack him, pursuing him all the way home and flinging a javelin at his door. Shudder with the Lancashire poachers who found a clutch of Faeries bundled inside their sacks, having mistaken them for rabbits. And pity the London labourer who spotted some Grigs dancing on a common and tried to catch one inside his hat – only to be pinched viciously until he freed it.

... we heard the loud laugh of folk riding, with the jingling of bridles,
and the clanking of hoofs ...
We looked round and round and soon saw it was the Faerie Folks Rade
We cowered down till they passed by.
A beam of light was dancing over them, more bonnie than moonshine:
they were all wee, wee folk with green scarfs on,
but one that rode foremost, and that one was a good deal larger than the rest with bonnie long hair,
bound about with a strap which glinted like stars.
They rode on fine wee white horses with strange, long swooping tails
and manes hung with whistles that the wind played on.
– Simplified from a dialect account:
anonymous elderly woman, Scotland,
quoted by Thomas Keightley, nineteenth century

A Yorkshire farm girl, helping at haymaking, found an abandoned Faery child amongst the stubble: she took it home to nurse, though it slowly dwindled away. A Shetland islander told his wife about a strange song he'd heard drifting from a mound: '*Tell Tuna Tivla/ That Funa Fivla / Has fallen in the fire and burned herself*' – and the next moment saw a tiny Trow woman rushing from his byre, crying: 'Och no, that's my bairn!'

Do not be too afraid. Relish your luck if you sight Faeries in some neutral place, for they are unlikely to do you any harm.

Yallery Brown

· *England* ·

Yallery Brown

‘Help! Let me out, you bog-brained barbarian – or I’ll unleash the fires of Hell upon you!’

Tom Tiver was walking home from work when he heard gruesome shrieks coming from under the ground. Searching around urgently, he located them to an enormous, flat boulder, half-buried in the long grass.

‘Come on, you toad-faced lump of scum – set me free!’

Tom squatted down, got his fingers under one edge and heaved the boulder up. At once, out scuttled a grotesque Goblin. He was no bigger than a baby, but his grimy, earth-brown face was wrinkled like an old man’s, fringed by a tangled mess of tawny hair and beard.

‘So you finally managed to shift yourself, eh?’ the Goblin grumbled. He combed through his tangles with knotted, crooked fingers, snorting and gobbing. ‘Of course, you only did it because you knew I’d be honour bound to give you a fine reward. So what’s it to be: a gorgeous wife or a crock of gold?’

Tom’s eyes almost popped out of his head. But he was a well-broughtup lad, not a bit greedy, and he’d had it drummed into him that the best thing a man could aspire to was the ability to do an honest day’s work. So he answered politely: ‘Neither, thank you kindly, sir. I’m not looking for anything in return: I’m just glad I could help.’

‘Sanctimonious little prig!’ the Goblin mocked him. ‘Nobody does something for nothing. You’d better say what you want and quickly, or you’ll be sorry.’

‘Well, um ...’ said Tom nervously. ‘I tell you what I’d really like, and that’s some help with my farm work. Then maybe I could knock off a bit early sometimes and have some free time to myself.’

‘You’re joking?’ the Goblin squawked incredulously.

Tom shook his head. ‘I’m not.’

‘All right then, young ‘un, if that’s all you want, it’s yours,’ said the Goblin. ‘But you must have heard the code: don’t dare to ever thank me or I’ll never lift a finger for you again. And listen: as you’ve not asked for much, I’ll be on call for you: if you ever need me, just give me a shout.’

‘But I don’t know your name,’ said Tom.

‘Of course you don’t. But I’m telling you now. I’m Yallery Brown. When you need me, put your mouth on the mud and yell like this:

Yallery Brown
Come out of the mools
And help!

Then I’ll come running fast as I can to your side.

Yallery Brown picked a dandelion clock and blew its seeds in a great cloud around Tom’s head; by the time it had cleared, the Goblin had gone.

Tom thought that maybe he’d dreamed him. So he hurried home, had his tea and went to bed; and in the morning he got up as usual and went to work. However, a big surprise awaited him when he got there, for his usual jobs of mucking out and hosing down the byres and pigsties were already finished. The older farm labourers all looked at him quizzically but said nothing: they supposed he was playing a youthful prank, that he’d got up in the night to do it and that he was trying to fool them with feigned surprise.

But the same thing happened the next day, and the next. The farmer was so pleased with Tom that he doubled his wages, for the work was not only completed ahead of time, but done to an extraordinarily high standard. ‘Keep at it and you’ll go a long way in life, young lad,’ he said, slapping Tom heartily on the back; and Tom glowed with pleasure. Not only did he have more cash in his pocket than ever before, but he had more leisure time than he’d ever imagined possible for a working man. The Goblin had done him proud.

But good times never last.

One night, after Yallery Brown had completed Tom’s tasks to perfection, he ruined all Tom’s workmates’ labours from the previous day. He messed up their beautifully ploughed fields, filled in their newly dug ditches and snapped the tools they had carefully mended. Not surprisingly, the other men’s respect for Tom quickly evaporated and turned to resentment.

‘That massive pay rise not good enough for you, urchin?’ they hissed. ‘Trying to get rid of the rest of us now, are you?’

At first they just grumbled and badgered him. But when the same thing happened day after day, they went to the farmer in a delegation and told him what was going on.

‘It’s not natural,’ they complained. ‘He must be in league with the Devil. Either he goes, farmer, or we do.’

Well, the farmer thought about it and realised that what the men were saying made sense. So he called Tom in and ordered him to explain himself. When Tom started yabbering on about Goblins and rewards the farmer, shuddering at the thought of supernatural influence on his land, sacked Tom on the spot.

At first Tom was devastated. But then he remembered the Goblin’s promise to come if ever he was needed – and honest Tom certainly was in need now he had lost his job! So he went back to the flat stone where his adventure began all those months ago, put his mouth to it and whispered:

Yallery Brown
Come out of the mools
And help!

At once the Goblin was standing before him.

‘What’s the matter?’ he snorted. ‘Not satisfied after all, eh? Well, don’t say I didn’t offer you hanky-panky or riches; but you’re such a Goody Two-Shoes, you had to choose something all sensible and self-righteous instead. You blathering fool! Didn’t you realise it would do you no good?’ Tom drew himself up tall and looked down on the Goblin, determined to show that he was the superior one. ‘You’d better help me out of this mess you’ve made,’ he said. ‘If you can’t, just get out of my life for ever, thank you very much. Go away! Leave me alone!’

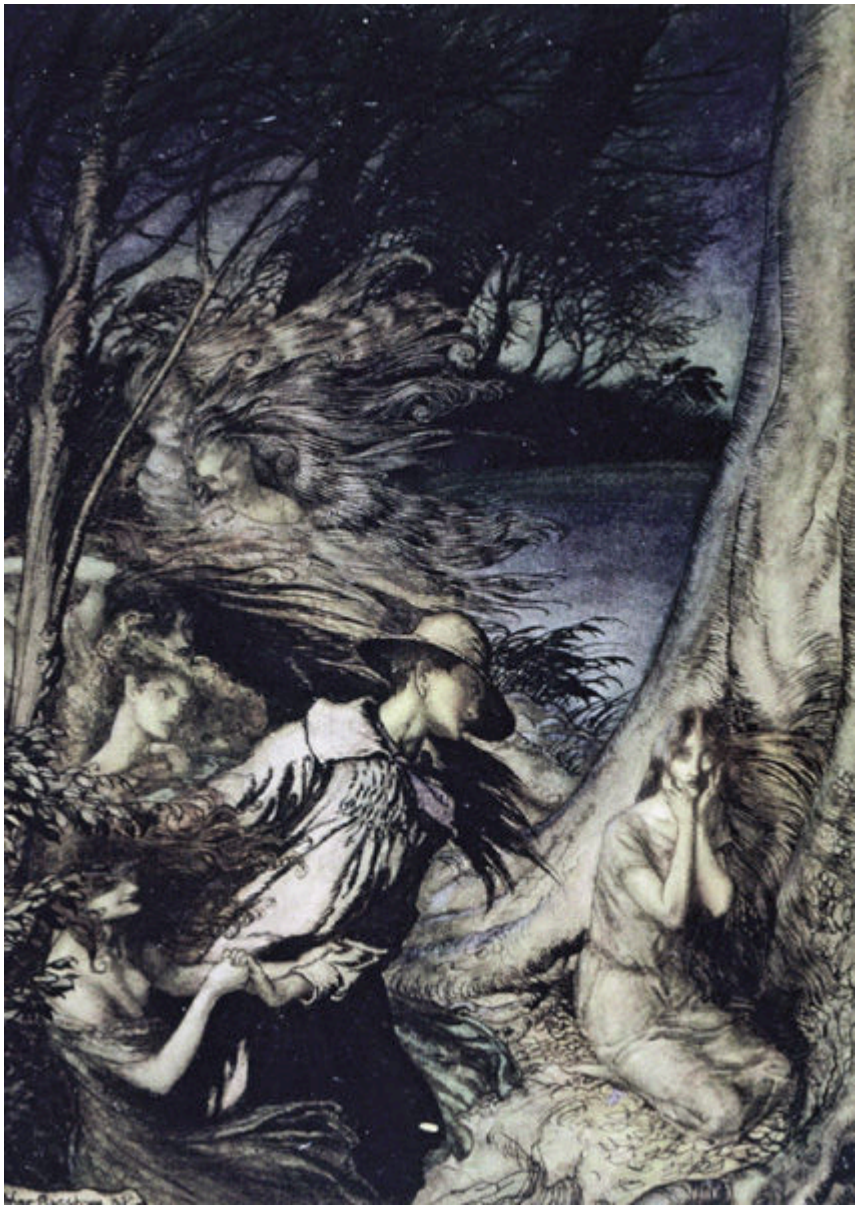
At once Yallery Brown gave a whoop of laughter. ‘You’ve done it!’ he cried. ‘You’ve said it! “Thank you very much” – those were your very words. I warned you not to thank me, didn’t I? But you couldn’t even remember a simple thing like that. “Thank you very much”, indeed! You’ll get no more help from me, Tom Tiver! No, in future, I’ll hinder you instead!’

‘What?’ cried Tom. ‘I never ...’

But the Goblin put his oversized hands over his grotesque pointed ears and began to chant in a loud, tuneless voice:

Work as you will,
You'll never do well!
Work as you wish,
You'll never get rich!
Fools who heed the call from under the ground
Get harm and mischance with Yallery Brown!

Sad to say, this time too, that malevolent creature's promise came true. For henceforth, everything went wrong for Tom Tiver. He never held down another job, so no girl was ever willing to marry him. Everything he aspired to or tried his hand at seemed to go wrong, for Yallery Brown plagued him for the rest of his days.



The Man Who Married a Faery

· *Wales* ·

The Man Who Married a Faery

A young man was walking past a lake when he saw a beautiful Faery lady sitting on the surface of the water. As soon as he got over his astonishment, he ran to the bank and called to her. She did not answer; but even from that distance, he could see that her smile was seductive. She raised a slim hand and beckoned him, all the while holding his enraptured gaze with her own dark eyes so intently, that he felt she was seeing deep into his heart. Unable to control himself, he kicked off his shoes and waded out towards her, splashing wildly in his haste, still shouting, begging her to come closer, terrified that she would vanish.

The bottom of the lake sloped so steeply that he was soon almost out of his depth and, sadly, he could not swim. But he did not turn back.

‘Let me touch you!’ he cried. ‘Let me love you!’

Now at last she sent soft words floating across the water: ‘I cannot be so easily caught.’ And with a sigh of laughter she dropped softly into the lake and disappeared.

The man went home distraught, his head filled with the memory of her: he couldn’t work; he couldn’t sleep. Eventually he confided in his old, widowed grandmother, who was very experienced in such matters.

‘You must go back to the lake with a gift and call her,’ the grandmother said. ‘When she comes, seize your chance.’ Then she took a loaf of fresh-baked bread from the oven and put it into his hands.

The man hurried back to the lakeside, bearing the bread. He held it out, calling his beloved; and very soon the Faery appeared again, away by the far shore.

‘Bringing bread indeed!’ she scolded. ‘That will not make me love you.’

So the man went home and related this to his grandmother. The next day she sent him back, this time with a ball of fresh-made cheese. He held this out over the lake, calling the Faery over and over; and in time she appeared in the deepest part of the water.

‘Fancy bringing cheese!’ she rebuked him. ‘That will not make me love you.’

So the man went home and related this to his grandmother. ‘Don’t offer her any more gifts,’ the old woman said thoughtfully. ‘Instead, go to the lake with something that you yourself enjoy, and see if it tempts her.’

So very early the next morning, the man plucked a rosy apple from the tree in their garden and took it to the shore of the lake, where he proceeded to eat it with relish. The dawn mist was still hanging over the water, but very soon it parted to reveal a golden boat gliding towards him, with the Faery lady aboard, trailing her fingers through the silvery ripples. Reaching the bank, she stepped ashore and held out her hand saying: ‘Bringer of fruit! Let me try it.’

‘I’ll only give you a taste if you’ll marry me,’ he said boldly.

‘Of course I will,’ she replied at once. ‘For that is my heart’s desire too. Since our first meeting, I have spoken with my father. He agrees to give us his blessing, with a dowry of all the cows that you can number in a single breath.’

The man could scarcely believe his extraordinary luck. He began to count at once, and when at last he was forced to draw a new breath, the exact number of cows he had reached rose from the lake and came to them.

‘Let us marry at once,’ the Faery said. ‘But first let me give you a warning. Take great care never to strike me, for if I were to suffer just three blows from you, you would lose me for ever.’

‘I will never strike you,’ he promised.

So the man and the Faery married and by all accounts they were happy. They had three fine sons, and, with their herd of Faery cattle, they all prospered. The man was so upright and amiable and full of love for his wife, that he soon put her warning right from his mind; for nothing would induce him to hurt her.

One day the family was invited to a christening at a distant village. ‘I’m not looking forward to it as I should do,’ the Faery wife confided, ‘for it is

such a long way to walk.'

'Then we won't walk, my love,' said her husband. 'I'll get the trap ready to carry us, while you fetch the pony from the field.'

'No, don't bother, there's no need for such a fuss,' the Faery protested.

'It's not a fuss if it will help you,' said her husband. 'Just go and fetch the pony as I said, my love, hurry along!' And to encourage her, he tapped her teasingly on the shoulder.

At once the Faery turned pale. 'Oh my husband! You've forgotten the warning! Though no doubt it seemed playful and harmless to you, don't you realise, you just struck me? Take care! Never do that again! For just two more blows and you will lose me.'

So he took greater care after that; and time went by and they were as happy as ever.

A year passed and then another until the family was invited to a wedding. It was a joyful occasion; so as they mingled with the other guests the man was alarmed to see his Faery wife sobbing bitterly. People began to stare at her, and to save his embarrassment her husband tapped her on the shoulder and drew her aside. 'Whatever is the matter?' he whispered.

'I am weeping because it is clear to me that this couple are ill-matched and heading for misery,' she answered. 'And now, my husband, you have given me extra cause to weep. For did you not realise what you were doing? You just struck me a second time! Oh, take care, take care! If you strike me just one more blow, you will lose me.'

The man was more careful after that; and time went by and they were as happy as ever.

A year passed and then another, until they had to attend a funeral, which naturally was very sad. However, as they stood with the other mourners by the open grave, suddenly the Faery lady began to shake with laughter. 'It is ridiculous that everyone is weeping,' she whispered. 'Can't they see how lucky this dead man is, leaving all his troubles behind?'

'Hush!' her husband chided her. And he patted her arm for shame at this inappropriate outburst.

At once the Faery turned to him. 'You swore faithfully never to strike me – yet that is your third blow. Farewell, my husband. You have broken the oath that I solemnly bound you to; so I must leave you for ever.'

Her voice was very calm. She turned from the graveside and walked away. The husband followed urgently; but though she seemed to go slowly

and he walked in great haste, the distance between them rapidly widened.

As she went, she began to sing, her words drifting eerily on the wind, calling the cattle she had brought as her dowry:

Hornless, Brindled,
Little Black Calf,
White-Freckle, Meadow-Freckle,
Brown Face, Squint-Eye,
White Bull from my father's court –
Now is the time to come home!

In the fields the cattle heard her: they lowed urgently, then came after her, ambling at first then running, leaving the green grass behind, following her to the mountains. Her walk became a tripping run, light as a wren's feather, fast as a gust of storm-wind, over the peak, down the far side, into the lake from which she had risen.

Her husband still hastened after her, weeping and shouting, screaming for her to stay. She did not heed him, but sank with her herd deep into the water.

He never saw his beloved Faery wife again.

Faery Wishes

· *England* ·

Faery Wishes

Everyone knew it was dangerous to go into the deepest, thickest part of the forest – especially at night, especially when the moon was full. You see, there was a Faery dancing ring there.

Well, you know how it is when you're forbidden to do something: it just makes you want to do it even more. Most of the locals managed to resist the temptation year after year. But there was a woodchopper who often used to glimpse the dancing ring through the surrounding trees, and he was desperate to find out if the gossip about it was true.

He knew his wife would get in a flap if he even suggested going near it. So one October night when the sky was dark and clear and a beautiful full moon was shining, he waited until she was fast asleep, then sneaked out. He hurried along an old deer track to the enchanted spot – a circle of very long, very dark green grass. He took a deep breath and stepped inside it.

At once he heard the sound of fiddles playing a rapid dance tune, and the stamping of countless feet. He couldn't see anything, so he guessed that the action must be happening underground. He stepped out of the ring and the music faded; he stepped forward and heard it clearly again. Never mind that he hadn't actually seen anything: simply *hearing* the Faeries was enough proof that their subterranean world really did exist.

With that, he went home to bed. The next morning he got up as usual, confessed about his little expedition to his wife, got the expected scolding, and went to work.

He was just about to cut down a very ancient oak tree when suddenly a voice screamed, '*Stop*! Don't cut down this tree or I shall die! If you let it stand, I shall give you and your wife three whole wishes!'

The astonished man realised that his experience of the night before must have given him supernatural hearing. At once he walked away from the oak tree and spent the rest of the day chopping fallen branches in another part of the forest.

By the time he got home, he was tired and really hungry; so he was irritated to find that his wife hadn't even started cooking their supper.

'I'm starving,' he grumbled. 'I wish I had some nice sausages to eat.'

The next moment, there was a noise in the chimney and something came tumbling down it. The man sprang back in alarm, expecting to see a trapped bird, but instead he found a string of best butcher's sausages lying in the hearth!

Just at that moment, his wife came in; and at the same time, the woodchopper remembered the invisible Faery he had heard earlier that day, and the wishes she had promised in return for saving her life. This must be the first one! Excitedly he told his wife what had happened, eager for her to share the good fortune; but all he got from her was another scolding.

'You daft old piece of mutton!' she cried. 'You've wasted the first wish on something totally worthless. I can get sausages for you any day in the market. You should have wished for a load of money or a fine house to live in. Honestly, I don't know why I married such an idiot! I wish I could stick those stupid sausages on your nose, to teach you a lesson!'

The next minute, her own thoughtless wish was granted too – for the sausages jumped off the hearth, flew through the air and stuck themselves onto the woodchopper's nose in a long chain like an elephant's trunk.

In a panic, the wife pulled and tugged and cut at them. She managed to get most of the sausages off; but the last one remained stubbornly stuck where it was, and nothing either of them tried would free it.

'Stop pulling!' cried the woodchopper. 'You're hurting me. I can't bear it!'

'Oh, I'm sorry,' his wife wept. 'I never meant what I said, honestly. Isn't there anything we can do to break this magic?'

'I don't know,' said the woodchopper. 'The only thing I can think of is to make another wish; but as you just said, we ought to save that last wish for something worthwhile, like a fortune in gold.'

'What's a fortune worth if your whole life is ruined in the process?' sniffed the woman. 'Honestly, I don't want more money and I don't want a better house. I just wish that stupid sausage would come off your nose.'

And at once her last wish was granted.

Only Me

· *England* ·

Only Me

A stone cottage stood right on the edge of nowhere, and in it there lived a widow and her young son. This boy was terribly lazy and willful: he never did what he was told.

Every night his mother worked like a slave, cooking, washing the dishes and banking up the kitchen stove. But he refused to help.

Then, when she pointed to the steps leading to the loft and ordered him: 'Up to bed with you, my lad!' he would stamp and scowl and rage: 'I'm not going to bed yet! It's much too early!'

Well, one stormy night the boy's mother couldn't be bothered with him any more.

'I'm going up to bed, myself,' she said. 'But *you* can stay up all night, for all I care!'

She climbed up the ladder to the loft, taking the lamp with her; and as soon as she was settled in her bed, she blew it right out.

'See how you like it down there in the dark on your own,' she called. 'Especially when the *Faeries* come out to get you!'

'Faeries!' scoffed the boy. 'You can't frighten me, Mam!' And he settled down to spend the night in the kitchen.

It was very dark, so he crept to the stove, opened the door and settled down in the warmth. Under their shroud of ashes, the logs glowed with a dull, red light.

The boy grew bored. He fidgeted. He drummed his feet on the hearth and gave a loud sigh: '*Hhhh*!'

At this, the logs shifted inside the firebox. Then all at once, a weird, reedy voice called out:

'What's the matter with you, then?'

The boy jumped. That wasn't his mother – he could hear *her* snoring away up in the loft. His skin prickled.

'Who ... who's there?' he whispered.

'It's only me,' answered the voice.

It seemed to be coming from deep inside the stove. The boy crept closer and peered in. A dark, spindly shape scuttled over the ashes and slipped down the fender onto the hearthstone. It stood on its two legs, tossed its head and stared at him.

'Scared of me, are you?' it asked.

'N ... no,' whispered the boy.

He was shaking, but he mustered courage and squatted down to see the thing properly. It was an Elf-girl, no bigger than his hand. Her clothes were the colour of sodden peat. Her hair was bleached gold, like dead grass.

The boy put out his hand and touched her. At once she spat at him:

'Oi! Don't you poke me! Who do you think you are? What's your name?'

'I'm not telling,' the boy said quickly.

The Elf-girl tutted. 'Don't make me angry,' she hissed, 'or I'll work evil spells on you. Hurry up: tell me who you are!'

The boy thought to himself, I could play her at her own game. So aloud he said:

'I'm ... I'm Only Me.'

The Elf-girl gave a coarse laugh. 'I like that!' she said. 'That's a good name. Tell you what: I'll grant you a wish in return. What do you want?'

'Magic!' answered the boy at once. 'I wish for some magic tricks!'

The Elf-girl nodded. She scuttled back into the fire and scooped up a handful of ash. She spat on it, kneaded it like dough and shaped it into a set of animals, each the size of a thumbnail: wolf, badger, weasel, rat.

Then she blew on them. The shapes shuddered, glowed and grew warm. They began to move. Claws stretched. Tails waved. Tongues slithered over teeth.

The boy was too astonished to speak.

'Lost your tongue?' the Elf-girl snapped at him. 'Well, if you've got nothing to say, make yourself useful instead. I'm tired after all that magic. I feel cold. Go on: stoke up the fire!'

The boy picked up the poker and prodded half-heartedly at the smouldering logs.

The Elf-girl hummed with impatience and kicked him. ‘Bash it, you weakling!’ she cried.

The boy thumped the poker down heavily. *Zoosh*! Flames seared up and a mass of red-hot cinders flew into the air. They scattered down like shooting stars ... and landed on the Elf-girl’s foot.

She let out an unearthly, heart-numbing shriek.

There was a moment of dead silence. Then the wind came moaning down the chimney – and another eerie voice called out:

‘Who’s that? What’s the matter?’

‘It’s only me, Mother,’ the Elf-girl called back. ‘He’s burned my foot, that’s what’s the matter!’

‘Burned your foot, did he?’ hissed the other voice. ‘Well, you just tell me who did it, my girl, and I’ll snare him in my spells! I’ll freeze his heart! I’ll make him suffer ten times worse than you have!’

Slowly, trembling, the boy inched away from the stove. He slipped behind a large chair in the darkest corner of the room. He was damp with sweat. He held his breath.

‘Who did it?’ said the Elf-girl. ‘I can easily tell you that, Mother, because he told me his name. It was Only Me.’

The hidden one let out a hideous groan. ‘You stupid child!’ it cried. ‘If it was only you who hurt yourself, what’s all the fuss about, eh?’

Rain drummed on the roof and the wind howled. Behind the chair, the boy could hardly move with fear. But he forced himself to peer out. And this is what he saw:

Down the chimney came a long, long arm, and at its end was a transparent, bone-pale hand with scratchy fingers clutching at the fire. The flames flickered beneath them.

The fingers found what they were seeking: the Elf-girl. They snatched her up by her ear and shook her hard.

Then a thick cloud of soot came pouring down the chimney. The Elf-girl screamed. The fire went right out. In the blackness, everything vanished.

That boy scooted up the ladder as fast as he could – and climbed straight into bed beside his poor, long-suffering mother.

You can be sure he never saw anything like it again. For every night of his life after that, until he was a bent old man, he always went to bed really early!

The Faeries' Mist-Gate

· *England* ·

The Faeries' Mist-Gate

It was Christmas Eve. The mother and father had to pop out to chop down a tree and cut sprigs of holly, so they said to their little lad, 'Stay here and keep an eye on your baby sister.'

But of course, he never listened; for his back was turned and his head was bent, playing kingdoms and toy soldiers. He did see, from the corner of his eye, that some Faeries had crept into the room; but he never realised what mischief they were up to – not until his mother came in and started screaming: 'Where's my baby? The cradle's empty!'

Then there was a right commotion: with the mother raging and crying; and the angry father brandishing a stick to beat his son. So the little lad fled into the coalshed, where his white cat was sleeping. He stroked her awake and told her everything that had happened. 'The Faeries snatched my sister!' he wept. 'I'm in terrible trouble, 'cos though I love her dearly, it's my fault the Faeries took her. Whatever can I do?'

Now, on Christmas Eve some animals get the power of human speech. So the white cat stretched herself and blinked at the lad, saying, 'I reckon that between us we can rescue her. Go and fetch some salt tied up in a nice clean handkerchief, then I'll take you to some friends who will help.'

The little lad didn't need telling twice. He sneaked inside and fetched the salt, then followed the white cat through the village to the parson's house. In the garden the parson's donkey was waiting for them patiently, the dark cross on her back gleaming in the frosty moonlight.

'A lad's salt and a donkey's cross,' said the white cat softly. 'That'll keep us all safe from those tricksy Faeries. Now we need to fetch the church Grim, for he'll know where they've taken your sister and how we can get her back.'

So the lad climbed onto the donkey's back, using her ears as reins, and rode to the church with the white cat running beside them. There they spied the Grim, beaming down at them from the top of the wall.

'I saw the Faeries take the baby into their hollow hill!' the Grim cried. 'They've left the door open wide, but put a magic mist-gate in front of it to keep you away.'

He jumped down and came dancing out. 'Don't worry, I'll come along and hold the mist-gate open. Then once you're through it, I'll take you into the hill and lift the baby into the lad's arms – for he mustn't get down from the donkey's back or the Faeries will grab him too!'

The church Grim jumped up onto the donkey, behind the little lad. Then the donkey and the white cat raced out of the village together, almost as fast as the wind. As they neared the Faery hill, sure enough, a white mist came swirling round them; it was so thick that the little lad couldn't even see his hands clutching the donkey's ears. Through it, they heard the sound of merry pipes drifting loudly from the hilltop, along with impish laughter and stamping feet.

The Grim clapped his hands. The mist split in two, revealing a wideopen door.

The white cat raced inside, followed by the donkey with the lad and the Grim still on her back. And there they saw the lad's baby sister! She was lying on the floor unharmed, smiling and gurgling in her sleep.

The Grim leaped down, snatched the baby and thrust her into the lad's outstretched arms.

'They're coming!' cried the white cat. 'Act quickly! Sprinkle salt on her face!'

No sooner had he done it, than the Faeries came storming in. But when they saw the cross on the donkey's back and smelled the salt on the baby's face, they flinched and jumped back with blood-curdling shrieks.

The white cat tweaked the donkey's tail. The donkey spun round, then bolted out, carrying the little lad and the baby; the white cat followed at her heels. The Faeries came after them, snapping, pinching and howling. But the Grim ran ahead, darted up the church tower and swung from the rope, filling the air with the sound of holy bells ...

That finished off the Faeries! They all fled back to their hollow hill, every last one of them, and locked their mist-gate tightly.

The little lad and the white cat thanked the Grim, took the donkey back to the parson's garden and went home. There the cat stretched herself in front of the fire, purring contentedly as if she had been there all evening, and she never spoke another human word in all her life.

As for the lad, he shouted for his mother and father, 'Come and see: I've brought our baby back!'

Of course, they came rushing. And they were so glad to see their youngest one safe and sound after all, that they never even wondered where she had vanished to or how their little lad had found her.

And the little lad thought it best never to tell them.

Some Faery Tribes
of
Britain and Ireland

Bauchan, Bendith Y Mamau, Boggarts,
Bogies, Boomen, Bug-a-Boos and Brags

Pixies
England
Common in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. Variously sized, but easily recognised by their red hair, pointed ears, upturned noses and squat faces. Notorious for leading travellers astray, pinching lazy maid-servants, stealing horses and other pranks; though they also offer domestic services. Live in rocks, caves, meadows, copses and occasionally inside Mortal houses. Ruled by a king who issues regular orders for mischief-making amongst Mortals. Also known as Pigsies and Piskies

Brownies, Bwbachod, Bwca,
Cipenapers, Coblynau and Colepexies

Tylwyth Teg
Wales
Fair of complexion and features, usually wear robes of green or white silk. Ruled by King Gwyn ap Nudd in their underground realm of Annwn, where there is plentitude and everlasting youth. Most are physically small, gentle and benevolent; their taller kin are more malicious, stealing butter and cheese, and milking Mortal cows and goats. Some of their women – usually those who live in the lakes – take human husbands: marriage is conditional on keeping a particular taboo.

Derricks, Dobies, Duergars,
Ellyllon, Feeorin, Fir Bolg and Frairies

Daoine Sidh
Ireland
Descended from the Tuatha De Danann, the master magicians and original mythical inhabitants of Ireland. Live within hollow hills and raths (mounds), in luxurious gold and crystal palaces, ruled by noble kings and queens. Readily mix with ordinary Mortals, borrowing and lending food and cattle, using the services of their midwives and bestowing enchanted gifts.

Greenies, Grey Neighbours,
Grigs, Grogachs and Gwyllion

Elves
Scotland
Of noble heritage and ruled by formidable kings and queens. Delight in music, dancing and luring Mortals into their underground hillocks. Lowland Elves have long golden hair gathered in golden combs, and green mantles inlaid with wild flowers; they carry archery bows made of human ribs, and quivers fashioned from adder-slough, filled with flint-headed arrows dipped in hemlock dew. Highland Elves are physically similar to Mortals; they are skilled blacksmiths, textile workers and cooks.

Henkies, Hill Folk, Hobs, Lobs,
Hogmen and Hobgoblins

Tiddy People and Yarthkins
England
Live in the Lincolnshire fens. The size of a ‘span’ between a man’s thumb tip and little finger, and physically repulsive, with thread-like arms and legs, drooping heads and tongues dangling from elongated mouths. Wear green clothes and fungus-yellow hats. Passionate about growth, they help plants to seed and ripen.

Killmoulis, Klippes, Knockers,
Leprechauns and Lil’ Fellas

Ferrishyn
Isle of Man

Yard-high, sour-stinking Faeries that haunt both valleys and hilltops, tumbling in lonely pools. Notorious for borrowing Mortal horses overnight for their hunting parties, returning them at dawn weak with exhaustion, covered in sweat and foam.

Pechs, Pharisees, Phynnodderees,
Plant Annwn and Portunes

Trows
Shetland and Orkney
Have the same characteristics as most Faery races, but distinguished by their grey clothes and aversion to sunlight. Great musicians, famed for their skill as fiddlers. Generally feared and avoided, but bring luck to families they take a liking to. It is said that In 1750 their numbers reached plague proportions on the Shetland island of Papa Stour.

Sidh, Siofra and Small People,
Spriggans, Sprites and Subterraneans

King Herla

· England and Wales ·

King Herla

There was a High King of Ancient Britain called Herla, who kept his court in the rolling lands between Wales and England. One evening, riding home to his castle, he was accosted by a very peculiar little man riding a goat. He had cloven feet, a red beard that dangled right down to his belly and a robe fashioned from the dappled skin of a deer fawn.

King Herla hailed him and the little man dismounted with a flourishing bow. ‘Greetings from the Other World, my cousin!’ he cried.

‘How dare you call me “cousin”?’ King Herla retorted. ‘How do you trace our kinship? I have never seen you before in my life, and I have no connection with the Other World.’

The little man winked at him conspiratorially. ‘Ahah! Yet we both share royal blood, Herla – for like you, I am High King over numerous underlords and more loyal subjects than anyone could count. The only difference is that you rule in the Mortal Realm – whilst *I* am King of the Faeries.’

‘What do you want of me?’ said Herla cautiously.

The Faery King winked again. ‘I bring you an urgent message from the King of France.’

‘The King of France is my enemy,’ said King Herla.

‘Exactly,’ the Faery King replied. ‘But thanks to my intervention, cousin, soon you will be allies – for he has granted you the honour of marrying his daughter.’

King Herla stared at him in amazement. ‘Well! Has he now? That would certainly be an auspicious match, which would bring an end to our hostilities. But how can this marriage take place? No arrangements have been made between our ambassadors.’

‘Oh, don’t worry about such trifles,’ the Faery King assured him. ‘I have conducted all the necessary business on your behalf, cousin. The wedding is already arranged for tomorrow – both the ceremony to make this glorious lady yours, and the feast. I’m organising it all for you, entirely at my own expense.’

‘That is very generous of you,’ said King Herla. ‘And yet, such magnanimity is always double edged, for now I am obliged to reciprocate. But how?’

‘Oh, that is quite simple,’ said the Faery King. ‘I’m going to hold my own wedding exactly a year after yours. All you need to do in return for my favour, is attend it at my own hall in the Faery Realms.’

Before King Herla could protest or ask any more, the Faery King seized his hand and shook it heartily. Then he leaped back onto his goat, turned towards the distant mountains and vanished.

The next day, the King of France’s ambassadors arrived at King Herla’s court with a priest and a stunningly beautiful bride. The marriage was formalised according to the laws and customs of his realm. Then the wedding party retired into Herla’s hall, where he took his seat at the head of the table beside his new queen.

At once, there was a great commotion outside: horses stamping, goats bleating and musicians playing merry tunes on pipes and drums. The door burst open and the Faery King marched in, leading a great procession of magnificently clothed Faery ladies and lords. They bore gold and crystal vessels brimming with delectable food and drink, and hung blazing gemstones from the rafters, filling the hall with dazzling, unearthly light. Then they fanned out along the feasting tables, heaping rich meats and fruits onto the guests’ dishes and filling their cups with wine. The Faeries were so diligent that all King Herla’s own servants were redundant and thus could join the celebrations.

The feasting and dancing went on all night. However, as soon as some distant cocks crowed to announce the dawn, the Faery host shrieked in great alarm. They shrank away from the Mortal guests they were serving, massed around their King and swept out through the door like a cloud of dust.

King Herla hurried after them, shouting effusive thanks to his newfound kinsman. The Faery King turned his goat and leaned down to him, offering Herla his hand.

‘The pleasure has been entirely mine,’ he said. ‘I’m glad you enjoyed the humble arrangements I made for you. So remember the bargain we struck yesterday, Herla: in exactly a year from now you must reciprocate by attending my own wedding in the Faery Realms. Wait for me on the appointed day at our previous meeting place, and I will take you into the hollow hills.’

Then the Faery King led his party into a white mist that rose softly from the ground to envelop them; and when it evaporated a few moments later, the entire host had gone.

A year passed.

Herla, committed to his bargain, rode to the agreed rendezvous with a small group of trusted courtiers, their horses laden with heavy sacks of gold. The Faery King hastened up on his goat, beckoning earnestly, and Herla’s party followed him towards the mountains.

They rode through the foothills and up the steep sloping paths to the peaks. Then they descended into a craggy ravine, which led through the rocks into a long, narrow passage, spiralling down deep into the ground. They emerged into a cavern, where the Faery King bade King Herla and his men dismount.

As they did so, lights began to twinkle on all sides, on the ground and in the ceiling, softly at first, then ever brighter. The cavern was transformed into a magnificent hall, warm and brilliant as the sun, where hundreds of Faery nobles were milling around gorgeously laden tables.

The Faery King was duly married by one of his priests. King Herla presented him with his bountiful gift of gold, which was much appreciated. Then Herla joined the Faery host at their banquet, followed by a long night of festive dancing.

All too soon it was over and the Faery King was tapping Herla on the shoulder saying, ‘Hurry, cousin: it is time to return to the Upper Realm.’

He led King Herla back from the cavern to the foothills, where he presented Herla’s courtiers with gifts of fine horses and hawks.

‘What is this for?’ King Herla protested. ‘You already overburdened me last year with a generosity that I have found hard to match!’

‘Not so,’ the Faery King insisted. ‘The treasure you gave me last night, Herla, far outweighs your debt to me. Now then, here is one more gift – a very special one – for you.’

Gravely, he pressed a small bloodhound into Herla's arms.

'Take great care of this, my kinsman,' he said, 'and listen carefully to this advice: *Do not let any man in your company dismount until this hound has first leaped from your arms of its own free will*.'

Then they parted for the final time, and Herla led his men back towards his castle.

The journey was much longer than Herla remembered. As the day unfolded and their horses plodded on, Herla thought longingly of his beautiful French wife who was surely sitting by the window, awaiting his return. Consumed by sudden impatience to see her, he hailed a passing shepherd and asked if there was any news of his beloved.

The shepherd stared up at him in bewilderment, scarcely acknowledging the King's rich garments or noble retinue of fine horses and men. 'Please could you speak more slowly sir,' he said, 'for I find it hard to understand you.' His own accent was strangely thick and foreign sounding.

Herla repeated his question twice more. However, it was clear that the bewildered shepherd did not recognise his own monarch, for he fell to his knees and said, 'Forgive me, my lord. I can see you are a mighty king – but of which country? What language are you speaking? You're not a Saxon like me, are you? And you don't sound like a Welshman from beyond the marches either. Have you just arrived here from some distant land?

'I am Herla, High King of all Britain,' came the answer.

At these words the shepherd turned very pale. 'King Herla?' he whispered. 'Then – God help me! –You must be a ghost! I've heard the story-singers' tales of great King Herla, who was spirited away by the Faeries and lost for ever – but that was over three hundred years ago!'

Now it was Herla's turn to blanche. 'Three hundred years ago?' he cried. 'But the Faery King's wedding only lasted three days!'

'My lord,' said one of his courtiers tremulously, 'Do you not remember what they say about the passing of time in the Other World? The Faery King must have tricked us all!'

King Herla groaned. 'Oh, sorrow! Then my dear wife must be long dead! My kingdom must be in ruins!'

The shepherd shook his head and hurried on his way.

King Herla's men began to pound their breasts with grief. Some, in defiance of the Faery King's warning, leaped from their horses.

Almost at once, each man collapsed and crumbled into dust.

‘Stay!’ King Herla cried. ‘I forbid any other man to touch the earth before this hound!’

The surviving men were all so shaken, they promised to obey him. And so they rode on, lamenting their dreadful fate, for mile after mile after mile; and all the way, the gentle bloodhound stayed resolutely in King Herla’s arms. Was it was dead or merely sleeping? No man could guess ...

But neither the hound, nor King Herla, nor any of his retinue, ever set foot on the earth again.

Hence the story hath it that King Herla, in endless wandering,
maketh mad marches with his army without stay or rest.
Many have seen that army, as they declare.
But finally, in the first year of the coronation of our King Henry,
it ceased, so men say, to visit our kingdom frequently as in the past.
And then it was seen by many Welsh sinking into the river Wye at Hereford.
But from that hour that wild march ceased,
just as if these rovers had handed over their wanderings to us for
their own peace.
Walter Map, England, twelfth century

The Leprechaun’s Trick

· *Ireland* ·

The Leprechaun's Trick

One sunny morning, Tom Fitzpatrick was strolling along beside a hedge when he heard a *tap-tap-tapping* sound coming from the other side.

He crept to the stile, climbed over it and tiptoed towards the noise, wondering what on earth it could be. First, he saw a gallon-sized brown pitcher. Then he spotted a tiny old man standing beside it. The fellow was no bigger than Tom's hand, dressed in a cocked hat and a leather apron.

'It's a Leprechaun!' thought Tom. 'And there's me lived all my life until now, never believing they existed!'

He stood dead still, watching goggle–eyed. The Leprechaun climbed onto a wooden stool to fill a wooden mug from the pitcher, then gulped it down thirstily. When he was satisfied, he sat down on the stool, picked up a small, half-made shoe and set to work on it with hammer and nails, banging the heel-piece firmly into place.

'I wonder if he's really got a hidden store of treasure like they say?' thought Tom. 'But hold on, I need to keep my wits about me. I've heard Leprechauns disappear if you take your eyes off them, so I'd better not even blink. And they're easily offended, so if I want to get some of his treasure, I need to act polite.'

He fixed his eyes on the little fellow like a cat on a mouse, then cleared his throat and called out, in the friendliest voice he could muster: 'Good morning to you, honest man! That's a very fine piece of work you have there.'

The Leprechaun looked up and gazed at Tom for a long moment. Finally he said, 'Good morning to you too, Mortal, and thank you kindly for the

compliment, which I hope was sincerely paid. Is there something I can do for you?'

'Better not ask outright for the treasure,' Tom thought to himself. So he said out loud, 'Oh, nothing at all really. I was just surprised to see such a large pitcher under my father's hedge and, um, I wondered what was in it?'

'It's heather ale,' the Leprechaun replied. 'I brewed it myself – I learned the recipe from the Vikings.'

'You're joking, surely?' said Tom. 'It's over a thousand years since the Vikings were in Ireland!'

'Is it really?' said the Leprechaun. 'Well then, it must be over a thousand years since they taught it to me. Now then, Mortal, that's enough of your questions. Instead of wasting time gossiping with an old fellow like me, you'd be better off minding your father's cows. For I've just seen them break into the field of oats behind you and they're trampling the whole crop.'

Tom gave a start of horror and almost turned round to see if what the little fellow claimed was true. However, just in time, he stopped himself, thinking, 'No doubt this is a cunning trick to make me take my eyes off the Leprechaun.'

So he stood firm, staring at the little fellow severely, and blurted out, 'You're having me on!'

The Leprechaun stared right back at him.

'I know all about your kind: you're all devious cheats!' Tom went on brazenly. 'But you won't get the better of me. Come on, let's have a share of that famous buried treasure of yours!'

'Tut, tut, tut!' the Leprechaun said. 'Even if I had any treasure, I wouldn't share it with a cocky brat like you.'

At this insult, Tom's hackles rose and he completely forgot his good manners. '"*Even if I had any* ..." he mocked. 'Of course, you've got some treasure. *All* Leprechauns have treasure, everyone knows that. Well, if you won't share it willingly like a good fellow, I'll *force* you to!'

He bent down and grabbed the Leprechaun roughly, knocking down the pitcher and spilling heather ale all over the ground.

'You bully!' the Leprechaun screeched at him. 'You wastrel!'

'You can't scare me with your bad mouthing,' said Tom breathlessly, clutching the tiny man in his fist. 'I've got you in my power now. Come on, show me your treasure, or I'll squash you to death!'

The Leprechaun peered out from between Tom's fingers, looking thoroughly intimidated.

'All right, all right,' he muttered. 'I'll show you. It's hidden just a couple of fields away. Go exactly where I tell you and you'll find it soon enough.'

'That's better,' said Tom. 'So which way?'

'Go to the end of this hedge,' said the Leprechaun. 'Then squeeze through the gap.'

Tom was really proud that he had persuaded his captive to co-operate so quickly. Clutching the Leprechaun tightly and keeping his gaze fixed on him, he ran along the hedge, and at the far end somehow managed to push his way through its dense thorns into an area of open moor. Then it was 'Leap over that ditch'; 'Straight across that bog and mind you don't slip and drop me'; 'Up that hill as fast as you can' and so on – until they reached another field. Tom was surprised to recognise it as his father's own fallow land, covered from end to end with yellow ragwort.

'The wretch has forced me to go the most difficult way possible in order to end up almost where I started,' he thought. 'Still, best not to criticise until I've actually got my hands on that treasure. Fancy it being buried here, and none of us ever guessing!'

'Here's where my treasure is buried,' said the Leprechaun pleasantly.

'Whereabouts exactly?' asked Tom.

'Under that very ragwort stem,' said the Leprechaun, pointing. 'Dig directly beneath it and I swear on my life, you'll find a large crock full of golden guineas.'

'Excellent!' said Tom. 'Thank you, little man. How far must I dig?'

'You need to dig as deep as you are tall, I'm afraid,' said the Leprechaun regretfully. 'It has to be like that, you see, because I only want favoured people like yourself to find it.'

'Then I'll have to pop home to fetch a spade,' said Tom. 'But that's no problem, for my house is just over there.'

'You won't forget which ragwort it's growing under, I hope?' said the Leprechaun with great concern in his voice.

'Not at all,' said Tom. 'Because I always think ahead. Look ...' Still clutching the Leprechaun and watching him from the corner of his eye, he pulled a bright red handkerchief from his pocket and tied it carefully to the plant that the Leprechaun had pointed out. 'There,' he said. 'Is that the right place?'

‘Exactly right,’ nodded the Leprechaun. ‘So I suppose you don’t need me any more now?’

Tom tightened the handkerchief around the stem so that it couldn’t blow off. ‘No, I don’t, thank you kindly, honest man,’ he said. ‘Just so long as you give me your solemn promise that you won’t touch or move this marker while I fetch my spade?’

‘Of course I won’t, Tom!’ the Leprechaun cried indignantly. ‘What kind of fellow do you think I am?’

Tom squatted down and released the Leprechaun gently onto the grass. ‘Back to your shoe making, little man,’ he said. ‘Sorry if I was rude before; sorry if I hurt you. And thank you again.’

‘Good luck,’ said the Leprechaun, squinting up at him. And with those words, he vanished.

Tom raced home as fast as he could, and in under ten minutes he was back at the gate of the fallow field with a spade in his hand. Before opening the gate, he looked across it, expecting to see the red handkerchief standing out amongst all the heads of yellow ragwort ... But he didn’t.

No, the Leprechaun hadn’t broken his word; he hadn’t touched Tom’s handkerchief.

Instead, he had conjured up a thousand identical handkerchiefs and tied them to all the other ragwort plants. The whole field was full of them!

Tom was beside himself with rage. He thought about seeking out the Leprechaun again, but he knew for sure he would never find him. He thought about digging up the whole field until he found the promised treasure. ‘But it might not even be there,’ he thought. ‘And even if it is, this field’s over twenty acres and the crock is probably not much bigger than the Leprechaun; and it would take me the rest of my life to dig to the depth’ he said over the whole piece of land.

And so Tom had no choice but to trudge shamefully home, cursing the wily Leprechaun; but most of all, cursing himself for being so naïve.

Arthur Rackham 08

The Miser and the Spriggans

· *England* ·

The Miser and the Spriggans

Wouldn't it be great if you could go Faery watching, see all their revels, hear their music – and not come to any harm?

Well, in Cornwall there used to be a place where you could do just that. It was a hill called The Gump. Every full moon the Small People would gather there for a party, with a feast and dancing and all the rest; and if Mortals wanted to climb up there and watch them, the Small People really didn't mind at all, so long as there wasn't any trouble. In fact, spectators who were particularly respectful and well behaved sometimes came home with a small but valuable Faery gift!

There was an old miser who lived in the town nearby, and every time he heard about the Small People's gifts it was like a stab in his heart. For folk said that these gold and silver trinkets were picked out from an enormous hoard of treasure piled up on the feasting tables. The miser longed to get his hands on it!

To give him his due, he did try to control himself, but he found it impossible. Perhaps the Small People had secretly cast a spell on him, just for the fun of seeing him suffer; for everyone knows that the Faery tribes despise stinginess and greed. Anyway, whatever the cause, one night when the full harvest moon was shining in the sky, the miser couldn't help himself. He put on his coat, boots and broad-brimmed hat, and set out to climb The Gump.

He was the only Mortal person out that night and he hadn't gone very far before he began to feel spooked. The moon and stars seemed unnaturally bright and everything was very still.

Then, suddenly, soft eerie music began to emanate from nowhere. First it was so melancholy that the miser's crusty old heart actually melted a little, bringing tears to his eyes for the first time in over sixty years. Then it turned

merry and fast, so that he had to stop walking for a few moments and tap his feet in time to its rhythms; he even found himself doing a little jig on the spot. He looked all around, but couldn't see the musicians, which wasn't surprising since the tunes were coming from *underneath* the ground.

No sooner had this realisation dawned, than the ground in front of the miser's feet suddenly cracked wide open! He jumped back in a fright, dazzled by brilliant light.

A great troop of grotesque Spriggans came swarming out – muttering angrily, stretching themselves from mouse-size to man-size then back again. Hard on their heels marched a band of tiny musicians, playing harps, pipes, fiddles and drums; and behind them were countless Small People and their children. Their faces were more beautiful than you could imagine, and they were dressed in bright green gowns and breeches, with jackets the colour of summer sky and hats decorated with exquisite cobwebs and tinkling bells. They were all singing like nightingales and scattering flowers, which instantly rooted into the ground where they dropped. As they spread out across the hillside, the grass and gorse lit up, until the whole place was sparkling like a million jewels.

The miser was quite overcome. He sat down to rest on a boulder and took off his hat for a moment to wipe his brow.

'But don't forget why you've come up here,' he reminded himself severely.

Round tables had now appeared, laden with gold and silver dishes that groaned with delicious-looking food; there were drinks in goblets carved from enormous rubies, sapphires, emeralds and diamonds. The miser's heart was beating very fast and his eyes were almost popping out of his head.

'Steady now,' he said to himself. 'Work out the best way to do it.'

The Small People seemed totally unaware of him, and the malicious Spriggans had scrambled down the cliff. The miser slipped quietly off the boulder, crouched down, and waited for a few moments, measuring the feasting tables with his eyes.

'Each one's slightly smaller than my hat,' he thought. 'Perfect! I'll smash the hat down over one of the tables and sweep all the jewels into it at once. If any Small People try to stop me, I can easily trample them like ants.'

He lay down flat on the grass, brandishing his hat, and wriggled forward furtively. Closer ... closer ... closer ...

He didn’t notice that the Spriggans had reappeared. He didn’t realise they were shadowing his every movement, slinking directly behind him, brandishing ropes of shimmering gossamer.

The miser reached the first feasting table. The gold and precious stones were just a breath away from him. He rose quietly to his knees and raised the hat above his head, ready to strike it down ...

Sheeee! There was a loud whistling sound. The Small People all turned to stare at him with gleaming eyes.

Suddenly the enchanted lights went out. Hundreds of cobweb-thin ropes came hurtling through the air, landing on the miser. Invisible hands tightened the ropes, pinning his arms to his sides, binding his legs together, gagging his mouth with sickly sweet fibres. He toppled over onto the ground.

The Spriggans were buzzing like bees. They performed a mocking dance all over him, stamping on his hands and face, pinching him hard, rocking with weird laughter.

The miser was a helpless, hopeless wreck of wretchedness and pain, but on and on went their antics ... until, all at once, a shout went up:

Smell the new day –
Away, away!

Down in the valley cocks were crowing. Dawn seeped into the sky.

The Spriggans and the Small People all vanished.

The miser found himself rolling over and over, down and down. When he reached the bottom of The Gump, he was still encased in the tangle of cobwebs, grown even tighter from absorbing the morning dew.

And that was how his neighbours found him later in the morning, groaning and trembling; sick almost to death with shame.

Tam Lin

· *Scotland* ·

Tam Lin

Once upon a time there was a thick, dark forest that was said to be enchanted. Sweet scents often drifted from it; creeping ivy and vicious thorns blocked every path that led to it. Nobody with any sense ever ventured inside it.

It happened that the laird who owned the land where this forest grew had a wayward daughter called Janet. One damp and misty day, Janet loosened the braids from her long hair, slipped out from her father's hall, ran to the forest edge and went in.

Under the trees, everything was utterly still and eerily silent. Janet walked on slowly until she reached an ancient well. Beside it stood a solitary milk-white horse in full harness; but there was no sign of its rider.

Janet called out but nobody answered. She crept closer to the well. The crumbling bricks were half-hidden by a mass of sweet-smelling wild roses. She reached out to pick one ... and at that very moment a young man stepped out from the trees.

'Stay!' he cried. 'Do not take my lady's flowers! How dare you enter this forbidden place?'

Janet stared at him. 'I can come here any time I want to,' she said coolly. 'My father owns this forest.'

The young man advanced on her, fixing her with wild, grey eyes. 'You lie! No Mortal can have dominion over this place. It belongs to the Queen of Faeryland.'

'What nonsense,' retorted Janet. 'You can't frighten me.'

'You may change your mind when you hear my story,' the young man said. 'My name is Tam Lin, and I used to be an ordinary person like you – until the day that I entered this forest. I was overcome by a strange drowsiness that caused me to fall off my horse and break my back: I almost

died. But I was rescued by the Faery Queen. She nursed me with her own hands until I was well again. Then she named the price of her care: I must stay here for ever as her bondservant and serve her every whim. One of my tasks is to guard the forest – and to capture anyone who enters it.'

Janet tossed her head. 'You'll not catch me, Tam Lin.'

He said, 'The Queen has evil ways to punish me if I let any intruders go free. But I am prepared to risk that for you – if you will help me in return.'

'Help you, Tam Lin? In what way?'

'You must come back here,' he said, 'at midnight tomorrow.'

'I'd be a fool to agree to that,' said Janet. 'Tomorrow is the most dangerous night of the year – it's Hallowe'en!'

'Indeed,' said Tam Lin. 'But you would be even more of a fool to refuse me. For at Hallowe'en the Faery Queen will lead her procession past this very well – and I will be able to escape her if you can pull me free. Come back here; deliver me from her torments! It is my only chance – and your only chance too. For if you either spurn me or fail this task, the Faery Queen will hunt you out and make you her slave as well.'

'But what must I do?' cried Janet. 'Surely it cannot be so easy?'

'You are right,' said Tam Lin. 'The Faery Queen will terrify you: she will try to beat you down with grotesque shape-shifting spells. You must find the strength to resist them.'

Janet shook her head and shuddered, making to flee him. She searched frantically for the path she had come down, or for some deer track that might take her away from this haunted glade; but whichever way she turned, he was there first to block her way.

'Very well,' she whispered hopelessly, 'I … I will do my best to help you. There, I have agreed. Now let me go.'

'No,' he said. 'First you must show I can trust you.'

'I swear that you can!'

'Swearing is not enough. There is no trust without love.'

'All right then, yes, I love you,' she answered quickly.

Tam Lin seized her hand in a strong, cold grip. 'Saying it is not enough,' he said. 'You shall not go until you have proved it.'

She struggled frantically against him; but the scent of tumbling, wind-blown roses was overwhelming. She found herself sinking to the ground amongst their fallen, rotting petals. Dimly she saw Tam Lin drop to the

damp green grass beside her; then softly she felt his touch, sweetly his lips …

Until everything was lost in fragrance and bewitchment.

Later, Tam Lin led her to the forest edge then melted away into the trees. Janet ran home in a frenzy of passion and shame. She spoke to no one. The next day dawned and passed; and then it was the night of Hallowe'en.

Her father made a great fire in his hall, barring and locking his doors against evil spirits. But as soon as all the household was sleeping, Janet crept from her chamber and slipped out into the night. She followed the silvery path the cold moon showed her, back to the enchanted forest.

Somehow she found her way again to the well. And no sooner was she there than she heard uncanny noises. Bells tinkled. Hooves thudded on the dewy grass. Then two huge black horses stepped out of the trees. On the back of one rode a bone-pale man with flowing hair – surely the King of Faeryland! Beside him, dazzling with unearthly beauty, rode the Faery Queen.

Janet shrank away. The milk-white horse she had seen the day before came whinnying into the clearing. On its back was Tam Lin. He turned his head and held her in his gaze.

As in a dream, a nightmare, Janet stepped out to meet him. They came level; she touched his hands. His fingers tightened over hers.

'Pull me!' he cried.

She tried to drag him from the saddle. The Queen turned, saw her – and let out a piercing shriek.

Tam Lin tumbled heavily into Janet's arms. But at that moment an army of grim-faced Faeries came darting from the shadows, leaping at Janet, cackling and cursing, pulling her hair, pinching her, stabbing her with spiky lances.

Janet shut her eyes. She clung to Tam Lin with all her might.

'So you are the one who dared to lie with my favourite slave, are you?' screamed the Faery Queen. 'Well now, see the vermin that you gave yourself to!'

Janet shrank away; but in the end she could not help but look. The Faeries had turned Tam Lin into a scaly, writhing adder!

She screamed and closed her eyes again.

'Open them!' shrieked the Queen. 'Look at your lover now!'

He was a stinking bear, slavering and drooling over yellow fangs. She wept but still hung on. What else could she do? For unless she rescued him, she too would be taken captive!

An agonising, blistering pain seeped up her fingers. She screamed, almost swooned – and saw that Tam Lin had been transformed into a dead thing, a bar of smouldering, red-hot iron.

The pain as she clutched it was unbearable: it would surely kill her! She staggered desperately towards the well, longing only to dip her hands into its cooling water ...

Suddenly the iron bar quivered. Then it leaped from her hands of its own accord and splashed into the well. Steam gushed up into the cold night air. Silvery drops spattered everywhere, dimming the weird procession, dissolving it into silence.

But the Faery Queen was still there. She rode straight at Janet, bearing down on her from her murk-black horse, looming over her.

'You wretch!' she hissed. 'You have stolen my favourite servant. May your pleasure in him be short-lived and bitter! May his heart turn to stone! And may painful death come soon to you both!'

Janet paled and swayed; but at that moment a gentle voice called out:

'Janet! Do not fear her.'

She spun round. Tam Lin was climbing from the well. For a brief moment the Faery Queen glimmered in a shaft of moonlight – and then she vanished.

'She cannot harm us now,' said Tam Lin. 'You have succeeded. You have saved me – and overcome her.'

He held out his hand. This time Janet took it of her own free will; and they walked out of the forest together, into the quiet dawn.

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
Out of a bush o broom:
'Them that has gotten young Tam Lin
Has gotten a stately groom.
Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
And an angry woman was she:
'Shame betide her ill-far'd face,
And an ill death may she die,
For she's taen awa the bonniest knight

In a' my companie.'
– Traditional ballad, Scotland, nineteenth century

The Goblin and the Sprites

· *England* ·

The Goblin and the Sprites

An evil Goblin lives in the rank, black water of the bog: Cunning Borley, they call him. He's jealous and lazy, a merciless brute, a thief.

But that's not all. There are other, equally strange creatures down there too, living above the mud in the sandbanks: twittering, flash-by Sprites. They're knee-high to a man, pale brown like the sand, with piercing green eyes. They fly and dart about like birds, but really they're creatures of the night. Most people are scared of them.

But old Carrier John and the Sprites are long-time friends. This is how it came about.

Cunning Borley was searching for a soul-slave – an assistant that the wily wretch could practise his spells on, to make sure they caused enough harm. He knew he'd never manage to catch a Mortal to do this, so he went hunting Sprites instead; and eventually he managed to snatch away one of their babies.

It so happened that Carrier John was riding through the bog lands at the time. He heard the young Sprite wailing with fright and the Spritemother screaming. Then he glimpsed the Goblin, sneaking off through the reeds with something wriggling in his gnarled old hands, and he guessed exactly what had happened.

'We can't let him get away with this,' he said to Mag, his faithful old mare. 'Let's follow him and see if we can help.'

So he rode on, watching and listening. He heard Cunning Borley yelling at the young Sprite: 'Do everything I tell you! Answer me, you cursed, quagmire-stinking imbecile! Promise you'll obey!' But the Sprite hadn't learned to talk yet – not even in its own immortal tongue, let alone coarse

Goblin-speak – so all it could do was squeal and squirm. Cunning Borley soon realised that his captive was no use to him, not worth wasting any time on. So, in a fury, he hurled the young Sprite into the black water of the bog.

'Drown, you good-for-nothing!' he shrieked. 'And may your mother never get over losing you!'

Carrier John and Mag heard the splash. 'We ought to rescue the poor thing,' said John.

Mag didn't need telling twice. She waded out, knee-deep into the mud, with John leaning over in his saddle precariously until he spotted the pale creature, no bigger than his hand, thrashing about helplessly. It only took a moment to scoop it out. There was no sign of its mother. 'But she's bound to be watching,' Carrier John said to Mag, 'she'll soon find her baby.' So he wrapped the little creature in a dock leaf and left it on a sandbank, then steered Mag out of the bog back onto the path, and rode on.

He was right. As soon as the carrier and the horse were out of sight, the Sprite mother flew down to take her little one home. There was never a Faery anywhere who was more grateful to a Mortal! She swore never to forget this good deed, and always to be on hand if ever Carrier John needed her.

But Cunning Borley swore the opposite. He swore to cause trouble for Carrier John as soon as he got the chance.

Carrier John soon put the whole incident right out of his mind. He was totally unaware that every time he rode over the moor, the Goblin was trailing behind him, grimacing and muttering angrily. Nor did he realise that what seemed like sand martins darting about overhead were really the Sprites shadowing him to keep him safe.

One May morning, John had to carry a load of goods to and from the market. All his neighbours had trusted him with their handicrafts and garden produce to sell, and the Squire himself had put enough money into John's hand to buy him two kegs of brandy and deliver it to him. Carrier John was whistling as he set out, even though storm clouds were darkening the sky; even though his own wife had spotted Cunning Borley lurking in their yard and had had to throw a flat iron and a whole shovel of salt at the Goblin to get rid of him.

Carrier John's market dealings went very well. He got a good price for his neighbours' goods and stowed the money safely in his saddlebag, with a

separate leather purse for each person he owed. The Squire's favourite brandy was selling that day at a discount, so he was able to buy him three kegs for the price of two. He stowed that on the other side of the saddle. Feeling mighty pleased with himself, he gave old Mag a tasty hay bale to munch on, then set off home.

He was just crossing the bog, just entering the Goblin's land, when the storm broke. *Wham*! A crack of thunder. *Razzle*! A fork of lightning. Then the skies opened and a month's worth of rain poured down in half an hour. Mag struggled on bravely through the squelching mud, with Carrier John walking beside her to ensure that his faithful steed didn't sink any further than she had to.

They were both watching where they were going, so neither of them saw Cunning Borley sneaking alongside them. They didn't see his scraggyboned hand reach out, step after step, to loosen the nails in one of old Mag's hind shoes.

Half a mile before they reached the Squire's house, the horseshoe fell off. The Goblin was still lurking near them, smirking, when it happened; but neither man nor horse had time to spot him.

'Never mind, Mag,' said Carrier John. 'We're actually lucky because, look, we're just by an inn. The ostler is bound to have some nails. We'll call him up and ask him to fix your shoe back on.'

He stood outside the inn and shouted: 'Ostler, ostler! Come and help!' but nobody came. He wasn't keen to go inside, because despite the storm there were quite a few riders passing by and he feared robbers amongst them; still, if he wanted to get home that night, he had no choice.

'Wait here,' he said to Mag. 'Don't let anyone touch you.'

When he went into the inn, the ostler was the only person there, and he was fast asleep by the fire – lost to the world, as if someone had spiked his drink to make him unnaturally weary. Carrier John shook him and shouted at him, and at last the ostler woke up, calling for something strong to bring him back to his senses. By the time he finally stumbled outside carrying his hammer, the storm had passed over. Old Mag was standing where he had left her, patient as ever, but looking nervous. The saddlebags and kegs of whiskey had gone.

'I've lost everything!' Carrier John groaned. 'A dozen neighbours' earnings, not to mention my own commission – plus all the Squire's drink!'

As soon as the ostler had shod Mag again, Carrier John rode her straight to the Squire and told him what had happened. The Squire knew that John was an honest man. He told him not to worry, that he'd get the thief caught and the stolen goods returned; but Carrier John replied that it wasn't as simple as that.

'It's not a man that stole them – it's that Goblin!' he said. 'But Cunning Borley won't get the better of me.'

He hurried home and told his wife what had happened. They both set to work, staying up all hours. They made thatching spars and pegs, mats and hats. They bundled up fresh rushes to lay on the floors of town folks' houses. By next week's market they had a huge pile of goods to sell. Mag pulled them to market in the cart. By the end of the day, Carrier John was mighty pleased with himself: he had earned enough money to pay everyone back – and to buy the kindly Squire four whole kegs of his favourite brew!

He even had enough left over to get each of old Mag's shoes marked with an iron cross, so Cunning Borley couldn't cause any more trouble.

They rode home triumphantly across the moor, Mag trotting fast and merry as a young pony. As they passed the sandbanks, all the Sprites came soaring and swooping overhead, twittering:

Carrier John
Look in the ditch
The Goblin's loss
Will make you rich!

So John dismounted and poked around through the grimy, slimy furrow that ran along one side of the road. And there were the Squire's three stolen kegs of brandy, each one still corked and full to the brim!

But the Sprites couldn't quite fulfil their promise. For while Carrier John was hauling out the kegs, Cunning Borley came running up, waving and jingling the stolen bags of money. 'You'll not have these, you stinking Sprite-lover,' he cried. 'I'm hanging on to them!'

The next moment, a great flock of twittering Sprites came by, flapping wing-like fingers into his face, knocking the evil Goblin backwards. He teetered and pitched into a deep, bottomless pool – but he took the loot with him.

So Carrier John never got the rest of his stolen goods back. Never mind. The friendship of Sprites is worth a hundred times any worldly goods; and knowing that, he spent the rest of his life feeling happy.

Dealings Between Faeries and Mortals

Preserve the aged and the young,
our wives and our children,
our sheep and our cattle,
from the power and dominion of the fairies
Grace before meals, translated from the Gaelic,
Scotland, nineteenth century

Faeries, Elves and Goblins have their own strict moral code which is perverse and simplistic as a child's. They need and covet Mortals; yet their friendliness is mixed with narcissism and cruelty. They are finicky, fastidious, capricious, lecherous and unforgiving. They take offence at Mortals' neglect and even the smallest transgressions – and their revenge is truly cruel.

I cannot tell how the truth may be
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me
Storyteller's justification, Wales

A bright green patch of grass surrounded by primroses was well known as a dancing place of the Tylwyth Teg; but a farmer brazenly drove his plough straight through it. That night, he and his wife were woken by a loud clattering in the outbuildings. They found the milk already drained from the cows, butter stolen from the churn and all the eggs missing from the hen house. Within days, the cattle and poultry sickened and the crops were struck by a mysterious blight.

Faeries ruthlessly punish any who spy on them or cross their paths without permission, yet they intrude into Mortal houses whenever they wish, demanding punctilious standards. A kitchen must be left clean and tidy at night, for they despise slovenliness and dirt; clean water must be set out for them with tasty morsels of food. As for the householders, the Faeries demand that they should be honest, discreet, courteous and generous. Ill temper must be controlled, curiosity stifled, rudeness overcome, selfishness banished.

This relation I had from a person of known honour,
who had it from the man himself
Storyteller's justification, England

Two maids always used to set out a bucket of clean water for the Pixies to wash their babies in overnight. In return the Pixies would leave them some coins.

One night the maids forgot the water. Just as they were dropping off to sleep, they heard the Pixies outside their bedroom door, complaining loudly. One girl ignored them, declaring she 'wouldn't get out of bed for all the Pixies in Devon'. But the other girl rushed downstairs and filled the bucket at once.

The next morning, the helpful girl found a heap of silver pennies. However, the lazy girl was struck completely lame in one leg.

Faeries may offer assistance to their Mortal neighbours and tantalise them with treasures. Yet their covenants cannot be trusted or depended upon, and they are notorious for swindling and snatching back their gifts. Nevertheless, they expect Mortals to lend both assistance and goods on demand. Such loans may be repaid with a bonus; but Mortals who try to turn such dealings to their own advantage always get into serious trouble.

There now is the story for you, from the first word to the last,

as I heard it from my grandmother.
Storyteller's justification, Ireland

A housewife answered a knock on her door to find a Hill Man wanting to borrow a saucepan. Not daring to refuse, she fetched an old, leaky one, guessing he would return it in perfect condition. 'That will save me paying sixpence to the tinker to get it mended,' she said to herself.

The saucepan was quickly returned, perfectly repaired as she had hoped. However, when she set it to heat on the fire, it burned so badly that she had to throw away all the milk it contained. She scrubbed the pan clean and tried the same task again, but exactly the same thing happened; and a third time too.

'This isn't fair!' she wept. 'I've wasted sixpence-worth of milk tonight, through no fault of my own.'

At that moment, the Hill Man came tumbling down the chimney and ran past her and out of the door. 'So you didn't save sixpence from the tinker after all,' he chuckled. 'That'll teach you not to exploit us!'

Faeries love to lure Mortals into their hidden realms; but their welcomes are false and their hospitality bondage. They play cruel tricks with time, often preventing their captives from returning to the real world until their kin and friends are all long dead.

The grey old man in the corner
of his father heard a story
which from his father he had heard
And after them I have remembered.
Storyteller's justification, Wales

A farmer, out at dawn to fetch his horses from the pasture, saw some Faeries dancing to the music of a harp. With great excitement, he ventured into their ring – and was immediately swept into their revels.

Nobody saw him again for many years.

One day a stranger passed the very spot where the farmer had vanished, and was astonished to see a dishevelled man dancing there in a frenzy, as if he were having a fit.

‘By God,’ the stranger called to him, ‘Are you all right?’

The word ‘God’ immediately broke the Faeries’ hold over him. The farmer was able to step out of the ring for the first time since he had entered it ... But he immediately crumbled away into dust.

Another part of this conversation generally turns upon Fairies.
These, they tell you, have frequently been seen and heard;
nay, that there are some still living who were stolen away by them,
and confined seven years.
Henry Bourne, England, eighteenth century

Faeries lust for handsome youths, guileless virgins, broody young wives, nursing mothers and newborn babies, spiriting them away at will. When abducting an adult, they may put in her place a stock – a replica of the real person, either made of wood or convincingly lifelike. In return for a stolen baby, they usually leave a ‘Changeling’ – an ugly, ill-tempered, uncanny creature capable of destroying a whole family with its unfathomable behaviour.

I had this from my father, and he had it from his father.
Storyteller’s justification, Scotland

A fisherman was on the foreshore one night when he heard invisible carpenters chiselling, and a reedy voice hissing, ‘I’m making a wife for Sandy Harg.’ That was his own name! He ran home in terror, locked up the house and clasped his young wife in his arms.

At midnight there was a violent rapping on the door and all the village animals started bellowing and stamping. The commotion went on and on ...

Until, at dawn, it suddenly stopped. Sandy crept out to investigate. Sure enough, he had saved his wife from being kidnapped, for just outside their house the Faeries had dumped a large oak log carved exactly in her likeness.

The northerners to this day put bread, the Bible
or a piece of iron in women’s beds when travelling
to save them from being thus stolen ...

Robert Kirk, Scotland, seventeenth century

One of the worst tricks of Goblins is to carry flickering lights through the dark, leading Mortal travellers astray and into deadly danger. Will o' the Wisp, folk call them; Hobbledy's Lantern, Jenny Burnt Tail, Joan the Wad, Kitty Candlestick, The Lantern Man, Peg-a-Lantern or Spunkie.

A Devon girl ... once knew a man who, one night,
could not find his way out of his own fields, all he could do,
until he recollected to turn his coat;
and the moment he did so, he heard the Pixies all fly away, up into the trees,
and there they sat and laughed. Oh, how they did laugh!
But then the man soon found his way out of the field.
Thomas Keightley, England, nineteenth century

The Faery Borrower

· *Scotland* ·

The Faery Borrower

An island wife had a very fine heirloom: an old copper kettle. However, she was only able to use it after dark, because every morning a Woman of Peace, a Faery, would come knocking on her door, holding out her hand and chanting:

Lend me your kettle to cook my bairn's stew
I'll return it tonight so give me what's due.

The wife was irritated by this constant borrowing, but she knew it was dangerous to offend the People of Peace in any way, so she always handed over the kettle without question. However, since she had some understanding of how Faery minds worked, she would cunningly embellish this generosity with a qualifying rhyme of her own:

Cold is a sheep that's shorn of wool
Stolen a kettle that's not returned full.

These few words were enough to achieve what she wanted, for every evening without fail the Woman of Peace would bring the kettle back, scrubbed clean from her own cooking and full to the brim with fresh meat and bones. So on the whole, the wife and her husband did very well out of this arrangement.

One day the wife decided to catch the ferry across to the mainland to fetch some errands. 'You'll have to mind the house while I'm away,' she said to her husband. 'Be sure to listen out for the Woman of Peace knocking, and give her the kettle without any fuss. When she brings it back full in the evening, thank her politely. Then add some onions, potatoes and water to it, and put it on the fire to cook.'

The husband waved her off and settled on a stool by the open door, whistling cheerfully as he carved himself a new shepherd's crook. By and

by he saw the Woman of Peace coming along the path that led from the road up to the cottage.

He stared at her for a long moment, chilled by her unnatural aura. Somehow she was there yet not there; and her feet had less substance than shadows. A shiver ran down his spine. He stood up hastily, kicked the stool inside, slammed the door shut and drew a bolt across it.

The next moment, the Woman of Peace knocked, calling:

Lend me your kettle to cook my bairn's stew
I'll return it tonight so give me what's due.

The husband ignored her.

The Woman of Peace knocked again, then a third time. Still the husband did not open the door.

After a while he heard the rafters creak, then a scuttling of something creeping across the heather-thatched roof. It might have been birds, it might have been mice; but the husband was sure it was neither. The peat fire began to smoke and crackle.

The copper kettle wobbled on its warming stone – then suddenly shot up into the air and out through the smoke-hole as if a whirlwind had sucked it up!

After that, everything fell quiet.

The husband waited for a long while. When nothing else untoward happened, he wiped his sweating forehead, opened the door, took his stool back into the sunshine and nervously resumed his carving.

The day passed and twilight fell, the time when the Woman of Peace normally returned the kettle. She didn't appear.

The ferry came in and the island wife came home, mouth watering hungrily at the thought of the meaty broth that her husband should be cooking for her. Well, instead she got home to find nothing to eat – and, even worse, that her husband had offended the Woman of Peace.

'You good-for-nothing old fool!' she cried. 'We'll suffer for this, you'll see.'

'Och, don't worry, now you're home, the Faery woman is bound to return the kettle tomorrow,' the husband said, trying to placate her.

'She won't!' spluttered the wife. 'I'll have to somehow snatch it back from her. Huh! It's no good asking you to help. I'll have to do it myself.'

It was completely dark by now, but no matter: the woman crammed a stale piece of bannock into her mouth, elbowed her husband aside, wrapped

her warmest shawl around her shoulders and hurried through the night to the Faery knoll.

She found it quiet and empty. She rapped on the stone door but nobody answered. So, very daringly, she prised the door open with her fingertips and peeped inside.

She saw darkness, gloom and shadows; and right in the middle of all that murk, filled to the brim with fresh bones and meat, there was her own fine kettle!

The wife crept in, seized the kettle – it was heavy! – and staggered out into the moonlight with it. As she closed the door softly behind her, she heard someone moving about inside the knoll. Then a sinister man's voice called out to her:

Your husband refused his neighbour her due
Turned you into a thieving shrew
So shudder to see what comes to you!

There came a high-pitched snarling, then a jangling of chains. The invisible Faery man had set two great dogs loose! They came bounding after her, yelping and snapping. The wife ran, still clutching the kettle. The dogs drew closer.

The wife wrenched off the kettle lid, thrust her hand inside, pulled out a handful of meat and hurled it onto the ground. The dogs pounced on it. But in no time they had gobbled it all down – and then they were after her again!

She threw them more meat. Again they stopped to devour it, but quickly resumed their chase, gnashing at her heels.

In the moonlight, she could see her cottage just ahead. By now, all the dogs on all the farms round about could hear and smell the Dogs of Peace, and were barking like mad. The wife threw down the kettle, scattering the last of the meat and bones all over the road. The Dogs of Peace had to scramble for it here, there and everywhere. The wife reached the cottage, burst through the door, slammed it shut, pulled the bolt across and collapsed onto the floor.

She soon got over her fright and the next morning she retrieved the kettle, which was still in one piece. But there was no more delicious meat broth for them every night, for of course the Woman of Peace was sorely offended, and never called on the island woman again.

You can be sure that the husband never heard the end of it!

The King of France's Daughter

· *Ireland* ·

The King of France’s Daughter

There was once a young man called Guleesh who spent his whole life hopelessly scratching away at a barren potato patch. One night, feeling very wretched, he went out in the moonlight and wandered up the hill behind his cottage. Soon he reached the ruins of an ancient fort, where he sat down and began to grumble out loud: ‘I wish I could get away from this dump and find adventure!’

No sooner had these words left his lips than the moon vanished behind a cloud and there was an explosion of invisible voices and footsteps rushing past him. Guleesh leaped to his feet and followed the sound into the ruined fort, where all the voices shouted:

My horse!
My bridle!
My saddle!

The next minute he heard a loud whinnying and stamping as if an invisible herd of horses had suddenly arrived.

‘Well,’ thought Guleesh, ‘since I’ve got nothing to lose, I may as well try to join in with whatever’s happening.’ So he took a deep breath and brazenly repeated the strange incantation:

My horse!
My bridle!
My saddle!

Outside the clouds lifted, sending a shaft of moonlight through the window. Now Guleesh could see that a beautiful white horse was standing before him, wearing a bridle of pure gold and a saddle trimmed with silver. All around him were hundreds of shrunken, wizened Faery men, all mounted on similar though much smaller steeds.

They turned to Guleesh and all shouted at once:

Come on!
Help us!
Hurry!

Then with a loud cry, they all went galloping out of the fort, fast as an autumn gale. Guleesh hesitated for only a moment; then leaped onto his own horse's back and galloped after them. They dashed across farms and bogs. They hurtled past villages, mansions and hills. Finally they halted on a deserted beach where great foam breakers were seething over the sand.

Up we go!

shouted the Faeries, and they all rose into the air.

Up we go!

Guleesh shouted too – and rose up right after them. Through the clouds they soared, and over the churning sea; then suddenly they plummeted down towards a strange country and landed before the gates of a magnificent palace.

'Er ... pardon me for asking,' said Guleesh breathlessly to the nearest Faery, 'but could you tell me where we are?'

'We're in France, of course,' the little fellow answered. 'This is the King's palace and we've come to rescue his daughter. She's in a terrible state because she's getting married tonight to a neighbouring king, who's old and ugly and cruel: she can't stand him. She's managed to postpone the wedding for three years, but now her father has put his foot down and is forcing her to go ahead with it. What luck you're here tonight. You can help us snatch her away!'

'What do you want me to do?' asked Guleesh.

'Take her on your horse and make sure she doesn't fall off,' said the Faery. 'Just carry her as far as the fort where you joined us, then we'll take over.'

There was no time for Guleesh to ask any more questions, for all the Faeries were now dismounting and shouting:

Into the palace
Let's do it!

Guleesh followed suit. In an instant he found himself in a splendid hall, lit by a thousand brilliant candles and warmed by a fire of outsize logs in a fireplace twice as wide as his whole cottage. Rows of long tables were laden with roasted meats, cakes brimming with honey and clotted cream,

dishes of grapes and pomegranates, and enough flagons of wine for an entire army. Around this spread milled hundreds of nobles and gentlefolk, dressed in rich silks and velvets, tapping their feet to the music of trumpets and drums.

Guleesh felt ashamed to be amongst such splendour – until he realised that no one could see his rags, for he was now invisible too. He followed the Faeries to the far end of the hall. Here an altar was set up with two bishops waiting behind it to conduct the wedding. A little way off stood the most beautiful girl he had ever seen – so beautiful, in fact, that though her face was streaked with tears because of her dreadful fate, Guleesh was overcome with love for her, and vowed to do whatever he could to help her.

As she shook with sobs, her father, the King of France, seized her hand and led her firmly towards the altar. However, they did not get far before one of the Faeries suddenly stretched out an invisible foot. The girl tripped over it, stumbled and fell to the marble floor with a startled gasp.

Courtiers rushed to her aid, but the Faeries elbowed them aside and tossed a gossamer blanket over her, shouting: 'Vanish!'

And at once – she did.

The astonished guests screamed and poked helplessly at the empty air. Meanwhile the invisible Faeries carried the invisible princess out of the palace. Guleesh followed them outside and joined in the shout:

My horse!
My bridle!
My saddle!

The enchanted horses materialised at once. Guleesh leaped onto his own horse and the Faeries lifted the King of France's daughter onto the saddle behind him.

'Grab my waist and hold on tight, my dear,' Guleesh called over his shoulder. She did so just as the whole host set off. They galloped across the French countryside to the sea, then rose into the air; and in no time at all, Guleesh saw the familiar rolling green landscape of Ireland beneath him, with the ruined fort coming into view.

'If I'm going to stop the Faeries keeping her, I need to outwit them – and fast!' he thought.

So as soon as his horse's hooves touched firm ground, he jumped from the saddle and hauled the King of France's daughter unceremoniously after

him. Then he drew the sign of the cross over them both and shouted, ‘I claim this lady for myself – in the name of God!’

At these holy signs, a terrible shriek tore through the air. The next moment, all the horses were transformed into brittle stems of hemlock and thistle! The Faeries’ faces puckered with fury and yelled: ‘You cheat, Guleesh! You thief! The lady’s ours – give her back!’

One of them stomped up to the King of France’s daughter and slapped her hard on the side of her head. ‘You’ll pay for this!’ he shrieked at Guleesh. ‘I’ve struck her dumb!’

Dawn was lightening the sky and down in the valley a cock crowed. The Faeries shuddered and winced, sidling back towards the ruined fort, shimmering ... fading ... dissolving like night mist … And then all at once they were gone.

Guleesh turned uncertainly to the King of France’s daughter. Never in his life had he been near such a fine lady before! Knowing it was not seemly to take her home to his humble cottage, with neither mother nor sister to act as chaperone, he offered, ‘Follow me, my dear, for I know an upright person who will take care of you.’

The King of France’s daughter, though now unable to speak, smiled and nodded to show her gratitude. Guleesh helped her down the steep, stony path from the fort, past his cottage to the village, and along the main street to the priest’s house. The kindly priest was astonished; but on hearing of their strange adventure with the Faeries, he willingly agreed to give her sanctuary and lodgings.

Guleesh visited her there every night. Although the Faery curse made conversation impossible, they got along very well with eyes, smiles and what have you. The love that Guleesh had felt as soon as he set eyes upon her grew in intensity, and it was not long before she returned it.

The priest insisted that she write to her father, saying that she was safe; but months passed with no reply, indicating that her father had washed his hands of her – which, of course, was a great relief. Thus everything went very well – except that the poor lady still could not speak.

Since the Faeries were the cause of this affliction, Guleesh guessed that they might also hold the key to a possible cure. So whenever he wasn’t courting the King of France’s daughter or working his potato patch, he hung around the ruined fort, hoping for another sight of them. At last, on the night of Hallowe’en, he heard a flurry of voices and footsteps on the wind.

Guleesh threw himself onto the grass and lay very still as the Faeries rushed past him; then he crawled after them into the ruin, cocking his ear. Amongst the babble of chatter and cackles of laughter, he was rewarded by overhearing the following conversation:

'That stupid Mortal thought he'd got the better of us – but the lady can't even talk!'

'He thinks she's cursed like that for ever.'

'Why doesn't the fool realise that a simple elixir of that sevenbranched herb growing by his own front door would easily cure her?'

Guleesh did not wait to hear any more. He slipped away, raced back to his cottage and felt around the doorstep in the dark. There amongst the coarse grass, his fingers closed upon a tall plant that he had never noticed before. He pulled it up and took it inside where, by the dim light of his single lamp, he confirmed that it had seven branches. He lit his modest fire, boiled up the kettle, squeezed out the herb's white sap and stirred it into the water. Once it was thoroughly brewed, he tasted a little; and when he was certain it had not poisoned him, he carried it round to the priest's house and gave it to the King of France's daughter to drink.

Within a few moments of swallowing it, sure enough, she began to speak!

First she thanked him for rescuing her both from the forced marriage and the clutches of the Faeries. She also thanked him for being such a gentleman and ensuring that her honour stayed intact. Then she began to tell him all about herself, and her life in the French palace: what her hobbies were, who her friends used to be, and how her dear mother was long dead and her father had treated her callously for as long as she could remember; she talked about what she liked for dinner, and what her favourite colours and tunes and flowers were; and so on and so on; so that by the time she stopped to draw breath, Guleesh felt as if he had known her for ever. He in turn told her briefly and frankly that he loved her with all his heart and begged her to forsake her royal origins and accept him as her humble husband.

'Oh Guleesh,' she cried, 'I love you too and I accept your proposal most willingly.'

Since the priest was on hand, they arranged their wedding straight away. By all accounts, those shifty Faeries never troubled them again, and they lived happily ever after.

Flitting

· *England* ·

Flitting

There was once a family – Gilbertson, they were called – that was sure they had an invisible Boggart living in their house. Don't go thinking that was fun, because Boggarts are dreadful nuisances, always playing mean tricks and causing trouble.

To give some examples: while the household was asleep, the Boggart would sneak round the bedrooms pulling the covers off everyone's beds and opening the windows wide, so that they all woke up freezing cold in the middle of the night. When they were eating breakfast, the Boggart would thump his hand on the children's porridge spoons, spilling gooey blotches down their clean clothes and knock the husband's toast to the floor, greasy buttered-side down. As the wife hung out the washing, the Boggart would follow her around, swatting insects onto the sheets so that they got covered with black and yellow stains. And so on and so on.

The Gilbertsons hunted all over the house for the culprit, but never found him. However, the children did discover the Boggart's hole – a place in the skirting where a knot of wood had worked loose. They each peered down it – not that they could see anything, of course – and then the youngest boy poked an old shoehorn down it. At once, something invisible pushed it back, so hard that the shoehorn flew out and whacked the lad on the head! The children thought that was hilarious, and they spent a happy afternoon taking turns to push sticks, pencils, rulers and spoons down the hole and giggling as the angry Boggart thrust them back out.

Of course, children never think of consequences; but *you* won't be surprised to hear that afterwards the Boggart's tricks got even more malicious. There wasn't an article of clothing in the house that he didn't scrabble at until the edges were all frayed, not a corner of the larder that he

didn't sprinkle with mouse droppings, not a meal that he didn't cause to get burned. The wife and her husband hardly slept a wink, and as for the children, they'd run out of excuses for their school books having ink smudges and torn pages.

'It's no good,' said Mr Gilbertson at last. 'We'll have to flit, get out of here, find a new place to live. The Boggart is part and parcel of this house, so the only way to be rid him it is to settle down somewhere else.'

So that's what they did. They found a pleasant cottage in a neighbouring village and got everything all signed up. Then they packed their belongings, piled them into their cart, and squashed together on the seat in front. Mr Gilbertson took up the reins and off they went.

They hadn't got very far before they met one of their neighbours – John Marshall his name was – standing by his gate to watch them go by.

'Good morning, Georgie,' he called to Mr Gilbertson. 'I see you're flitting, eh?'

'Aye, Johnny lad,' Mr Gilbertson replied, 'we're forced to because of that pesky Boggart in our old house. The mischief he causes has become unbearable. We've tried this and we've tried that – but we just can't get rid of him by any means. So flitting seemed like the only solution.'

Mr Marshall opened his mouth to answer; but before he could get out a single word, there came a rustling from under the Gilbertsons' bags, followed by a peal of uncanny laughter.

Then a voice as deep as an abandoned well called out, 'Aye, Johnny lad, we're flitting.'

All their mouths dropped open.

'Blow me down!' cried Mr Gilbertson. 'If that isn't the darned Boggart himself! He must have got wind of what we were up to, and schemed to come with us!'

'Well, if trouble's coming with us, there's no point in moving, is there?' said Mrs Gilbertson. 'I never did like that new cottage even half as much as our old one. We might just as well turn round and go back to the home that we all really love.'

And that was that. The Boggart continued to play his daft tricks round about them for a few months more, but they learned to put up with it and ignore him. In the end, the little devil got tired of his sport and they saw no more of him. Whether he just went to ground, or flitted somewhere else to annoy another gullible family, they never did find out.

A Box of Faeries

· *Scotland* ·

A Box of Faeries

There was once a Highland crofter who fell passionately in love. However, his sweetheart was a thoughtful girl who had many suitors and wished to be absolutely sure that the man she chose to marry was the one most likely to make her happy, so she insisted upon a long courtship before making up her mind. The crofter admired her greatly for this and was willing to spend as many months or even years as it took to win her. However, there was one aspect of the arrangement that troubled him greatly, and that was the distance he had to travel in order to see her. For although she lived only a couple of miles away as the raven flies, their houses lay on opposite shores of a deep firth which was so full of treacherous rocks and dangerous currents that no boat could safely cross it. Thus, although they could wave to each other across the water, the only way he could reach her was to undertake a long journey, up his side of the firth and then down along her side of it; and at the end of the visit, he had to travel all the way back again.

When he wasn't daydreaming of his sweetheart, the crofter pondered this problem long and hard. The only possible solution was to build a bridge across the water, but of course he had neither the means nor the money to undertake such major work. So he asked around for ideas, and everyone gave him the same advice: 'Go and consult the old Witch of the Ness.'

So the crofter set off on a different journey, this time over the moors and under the mountains to a lonely headland where a tiny, tumbledown hut was perched among the rocks. On a ricketty-racketty bench in front of it sat a deep-eyed crone, gazing at the shifting lights of the sea. She greeted him kindly, beckoning him to sit before her on the grass and describe his problem, which she listened to with great sympathy.

‘I can give you just what you need,’ she said. ‘But you had better ask the laird to operate it, for it needs someone with enough power to keep control of it.’

She hobbled into her hut, returning with a large box, thickly wrapped in bunches of heather and tightly bound with plaited reed ropes.

‘Make sure you take this straight to the laird,’ she said, giving it to him. ‘Meanwhile, remember this warning: you must avoid all temptation to open it yourself.’

The crofter set off for home, excitedly carrying the box, and wondering what on earth it contained. It was not at all heavy, but it seemed to be full of loose things moving about, and when he put his ear to it he heard very strange sounds like agitated, high-pitched voices.

Of course, he was mindful of the Witch’s somber warning; but the further away he got from her, the less he was inclined to heed it. ‘The old hag has underestimated me because I’m just a crofter,’ he thought indignantly. ‘She doesn’t realise that I’m an intelligent, capable man. Of course I won’t be stupid enough to actually open the box, but there’s no harm in taking a quick peep inside – before I go crazy with wondering about it.’

He sat on a boulder, carefully untied a strand of reed rope and pushed aside the heather covering. Then he took the knife from his belt and poked at the soft wooden box until he had bored a tiny hole into it.

A shrill blast of air came shooting out – rapidly followed by hundreds of thumb-sized Faery men! They leaped at the crofter, poking his chest and belly with sharp fingers, pulling his hair and all screaming at once:

Master!
What do you want of us?
Give us work!
We are working Faeries!
Work, work, work!
You must keep us busy!

They were like outsize ants, crawling all over him. They were buzzing and angry as bees. The crofter realised he would never be able to catch them all, let alone shut them back in the box again. In desperation he shouted:

‘All right, yes, I’ll give you work. Um ... er ... I know! Go and strip all the heather off that hill behind this one!’

At once the Faeries rose in a humming spiral and flew off to do his bidding. The crofter watched them, and as soon as he saw that they had indeed started their labours on the far hill, he tossed the box away then went racing over the moors towards his croft as fast as he could.

But within minutes, the Faeries were swarming after him, shrieking:

Master!
We've done it!
We're finished!
The hill is stripped bare!
We've piled the heather neatly!
See, see!
Give us more!
Work, work, we must work!

The crofter looked back. Sure enough the hillside he had sent them to – once purple with heather in full flower – was now a desert of bare, dark earth and rock.

'They're like a plague!' he thought. 'How can I get rid of them?' Then he reminded himself why the Witch of the Ness had given him the box.

'Be still!' he shouted. 'Be silent while I give you your next instructions!'

To his relief, the Faeries obeyed.

'Fly to my croft,' he went on excitedly, describing exactly where it stood on the edge of the firth. 'Opposite it you will see another cottage. Build me a bridge across the water between them.'

We'll do it, master!
Work, work, we love work!
Let's get started!

The crofter could see they would build him the bridge he longed for in no time – but then what would he do with them? He couldn't get them to strip any more hills, or the beautiful Highlands would turn to barren desert. Luckily, he had a brainwave.

He called the Faeries to attention and said, 'Hold on, you mustn't build this bridge out of stones. Instead, use sand.'

Master, we'll do it!
No matter how long it takes!
We never get tired!
Work, work, work!

The Faeries flew away in a twittering brown whirlwind.

The weary crofter trudged home. By the time he arrived, he found they had already almost finished building a truly extraordinary arched bridge, fashioned entirely from sand.

Just then, the tide began to come in. At first the waves only lapped gently at the furthest edge of the sandy structure. But then they grew stronger and began to wash right over it. Within moments, the entire bridge had collapsed. At once the Faeries cried:

Broken, broken!
We must start it again!
Over and over!
Excellent, splendid – more work!

In this way, the Faeries' construction project went on, through one tide after another, day after day after day, with no prospect of ever ending. Each time the sea ebbed, the Faeries eagerly fashioned new bricks from loose sand and piled them up; and each time the sea flowed in, all their work was destroyed. Month after month this continued, year after year after year.

No one knows what became of the crofter and his sweetheart; but the Faeries are definitely still there on the firth, beavering away at their never-ending task. For whenever a storm breaks over the firth, they can be heard moaning and crying through the wind, impatient to resume their labours.

A Year and a Day in Faeryland

· *England* ·

A Year and a Day in Faeryland

Did you ever know pretty Jenny Purmuen? Yes, that vain and foolish little madam of a kitchen maid with flowers always twisted into her curls. How they complained about her in the last house she worked at! She was always behind with her tasks, they said, and sneaking off to preen in the looking glass, making up tittle-tattle and flirting with the lads. In the end, the mistress got so fed up with Jenny's time wasting that she kicked her out.

Imagine the shame of it! Her mother refused to let her laze around at home; besides, she couldn't afford it, seeing as the father had perished at sea, and there were six younger siblings to feed. So she said to Jenny, 'Get yourself off to the lower parishes where they don't know your lazy reputation, and find yourself a place out there. And make sure you mend your ways!'

Let's give Jenny her due: she wasn't really a bad girl, she didn't argue or complain. Instead she waved her mother a rueful goodbye and set off straightaway.

After that, nothing more was heard from her – which was very strange, because in the past she'd always been diligent at sending regular messages home with the carriers, and visiting whenever she was allowed. But this time, her mother didn't hear a snippet from her for months, and no one else had any news of her either. Of course, the poor mother got frantic. 'If she's dead,' she wept, 'please God, at least let someone find her body so I can bury her.'

The very next day somebody *did* find Jenny – and, thank goodness, she wasn't dead after all.

It was a shepherd who happened upon her, in a lonely spot on the moor. She was lying there white faced, sweating with fever and delirium. He picked her up and carried her all the way home in his arms.

Her mother put her in her old bed and fed her a diet of good gruel and affection until at last the colour came back to her cheeks and the fever faded. That's when she began to talk.

'What happened to you, Jenny?' the mother asked. 'Where have you been?'

'Oh Mam,' she replied, 'you'll never believe this, but I've been working as nursemaid to a prince of the Small People!'

'The truth, please, Jenny!' the mother chided her. 'Not one of your silly fantasies.'

'But it *is* the truth!' the girl protested. 'Remember how you sent me cross-country to look for work last year? Well, I set off like you told me, but it was such a hot day, I had to sit down and rest for a while in a shady spot in the middle of the moor. There was a stream running nearby, with beautiful half-open ferns growing on the banks. I picked some, and as I started unrolling the fronds, I suddenly heard a man calling out to me: "Good afternoon, young lady."'

'Oh no, Jenny!' cried the mother. 'Haven't I warned you often enough about rascals hanging around lonely places? You should never have stopped there. Tell me you ignored him, child: promise me you just got up and hurried away?'

'Don't worry, Mam,' said Jenny, 'he wasn't a rascal. He told me he was a widower; and when I mentioned that I was looking for a place, he said, "What splendid luck! Because I'm desperately seeking a nursemaid for my little boy. Is that the kind of work you do?"

'"Oh, I love children and I can turn my hand to anything, sir," I said. "Would you give me a trial?"

'"Indeed I would," he said. "Come with me and you can start at once."

'But I was cautious, Mam. I remembered you saying that I shouldn't accept a position without a contract and proof there would be regular wages. So I asked him about that straight away. He rattled his pocket and showed me that it was full of gold coins – so I didn't have to worry on *that* score. And then he said to me, "We'll swear a contract right now, using these ferns." He picked one identical to the one I was holding and made me

swap them over; then I had to say, “For a year and a day, I promise to stay”. He said that made the contract complete.’

‘But you didn’t even know who he was or where he was taking you!’ the horrified mother cried.

‘But I found out soon enough, Mam. He took me down such a pretty lane, lined with scented hedges. Unfortunately he didn’t have a horse, so we had to walk all the way. I soon felt exhausted again from the heat, and you remember how old my shoes were? Well they were getting full of holes. I couldn’t help crying, and I was worried he’d beat me for complaining; but instead he was ever so kind. He picked some leaves growing at the bottom of the bank – a herb, I’m not sure what – and dried my eyes with them.

‘And that’s when something really wonderful started happening, Mam. Well, two things. First, like a miracle, I stopped feeling tired. And second, the ground ... well, it seemed to shake – and then a big crack opened up and we sank down into it, yes, right inside the earth!

‘Of course I was dead scared. But he brushed my eyes with those leaves again, and they were definitely magic, Mam, because at once the darkness vanished and I found myself looking at a strange country full of sunlit hills and flowers that sparkled like jewels. There were people walking around – really smart gentlemen and ladies, like in those old-fashioned paintings that big houses have on their walls. When I turned round, my new master had changed into a gentleman too, all spruced up in a smart coat made of grass-green silk and gold braid.

‘A short way off there was a grand mansion, which was where he lived. He took me to it, and led me through loads of grand rooms, until my head was spinning. You should have seen the furniture! It was all made of very shiny dark wood, inlaid with pearls, ivory and silver; and the windows were hung with draping lace, so fine it looked like cobwebs. In the last room there was a cradle made from a large seashell lined with mother-of-pearl, and inside it was the dearest, tiniest baby boy.

‘My new master said, “Well, Jenny, it’s time for me to introduce myself properly. I am the King of this country and this is my son.”

‘“*The King*, sir?” I cried. “Oh! But what country is this? It’s not ...? Is it ... the *Small People’s* land?”

‘“Your job isn’t to ask questions,” he said severely. “It’s to look after my child as we’ve agreed. Wash and dress him, feed him, play with him, walk him in the gardens, and put him to bed. And mind you keep yourself

looking pretty, because if there's one thing I can't abide, it's a Mortal nurse who's drab or slovenly."

'I worked ever so hard, and did everything he told me, Mam. I made sure I brushed my hair each morning and put on the clean dress they laid out for me, and I took plenty of time to smooth my skirts down whenever I heard the King coming. His son was adorable, we got on really well and the time flew past. Sorry I had no chance to send you a message.

'Anyway, suddenly ... I don't know why, maybe the year and a day of my contract was up ... but I went to sleep one night in the bed they'd given me in the nursery – and when I woke up, I wasn't in the Small People's country any more, but all on my own in the middle of the moor. I was so upset, I burst into tears and cried myself back to sleep.'

And then Jenny began to weep again, so that her mother didn't know what to do. She couldn't send for the doctor because she had no money to pay him. She didn't send for the parson because she knew he wouldn't believe a word of Jenny's story. In the end she asked a wise woman from a neighbouring parish – Old Mary they called her – to come and listen to her daughter's peculiar tale.

Old Mary sat quietly by the bedside, nodding sagely as Jenny repeated her adventure. When she had finished, Old Mary said, 'Sit up and crook your arm, girl, and hold it there.'

Jenny did.

'Right,' said Mary. 'Now repeat this after me: "May my arm never come un-crooked if I have told a lie."'

Jenny repeated it.

'Stretch your arm out straight,' said Old Mary.

Jenny stretched and her arm immediately came straight again.

'You see,' said Old Mary, 'She's telling the truth. She really was carried away by the King of the Small People, to their country under the earth.' She shook her head thoughtfully. 'So long as she didn't offend her master down there at all, no doubt very soon she'll come back to her full senses. He might even send her a reward of gold.'

But you know, that silly girl must have done something wrong when she worked in the King's house – just as she did in every big house she ever worked in. Because the hoped for reward never came. And she never got better either, but spent the rest of her life unable to work, sunk into a terrible, incurable melancholy.

Spells

Spells to Call Up Faeries and See Their Enchantments

Faeries, Elves and Goblins appear and vanish at whim. Nevertheless, Mortals may sometimes influence their movements by using certain esoteric formulae, tried and proven effective by bold adventurers from past ages.

An Excellent Way to Get a Faery.
This Will Obtain Any One That is Not Already Bound

Get a broad, square crystal or Venus glass, three inches by three inches,
and lay it in the blood of a white hen for three Wednesdays or Fridays.
Take it out, wash it with holy water and perfume it.
Then take three hazel wands of a year's growth,
peel them fair and white and flatten them,
making them long enough to write the Faery's name three times on the side.
Then bury them under a hill that you believe Faeries to haunt,
on the Wednesday before you intend to call her.
The following Friday take them up and call her at eight or three or ten o'clock,
which are good planets and hours for it.
But when you call, be in clean life and turn your face towards the east.
When you have her, bind her to that stone or glass.

Simplified from a seventeenth century manuscript, England

Try to choose an auspicious time to summon Faeries: dawn, dusk, or midnight; full moon or new moon; May Day, Midsummer or Hallowe'en.

Come in the stillness,
Come in the night;
Come soon,
And bring delight.
Beckoning, beckoning,

Left hand and right;
Come now,
Ah come tonight!
Spell to summon Faeries, England, twentieth century

'*Glamour*' or '*Pishogue*' is an enchantment devised by Faeries to change and enhance Mortals' vision and sense of reality. It is achieved by application of a magic ointment, concocted from four-leafed clovers and other rare herbs. Those thus given the 'Faery sight' may see a mildewed cave transform into a glittering palace, and withered leaves mutate into treasure; however, such enchantments are unstable and easily removed.

An Ointment to Give Sight of the Faeries
to Anoint Under the Eyelids and Upon the Eyelids
in the Evening and Morning

Take a glass vial, first washed with rose water and marigold
flower water,
the flowers gathered towards the east.
Put salad oil into it.
Add buds of hollyhock, flowers of marigold,
wild thyme (gathered near the side of a hill where Faeries often go),
buds of young hazel, and the grass of a Faery throne.
Set it to dissolve for three days in the sun,
and keep it for your use.
Simplified from a seventeenth-century manuscript, England

Malicious Faery Spells

Faeries offended by Mortals relish conjuring up spells to inflict mysterious injury, or debilitating disease. They achieve this by striking their victims with flint or stone arrowheads known as Elf-Shot; or by nightly abductions in which sufferers are exhausted by enforced dancing inside a Faery mound; or by weakening them through unrequited longing for an unreachable Faery lover. Unexplained bruises are caused by spiteful, diminutive fingers pinching in revenge for betrayal, spying, or breaking the perverse Faery moral code.

If anyone has the water-elf disease,
then his nails will be wan and

his eyes will water and he will wish to look down.
Translated from an Anglo-Saxon manuscript,
England, tenth century

Spells to Protect Against Faeries

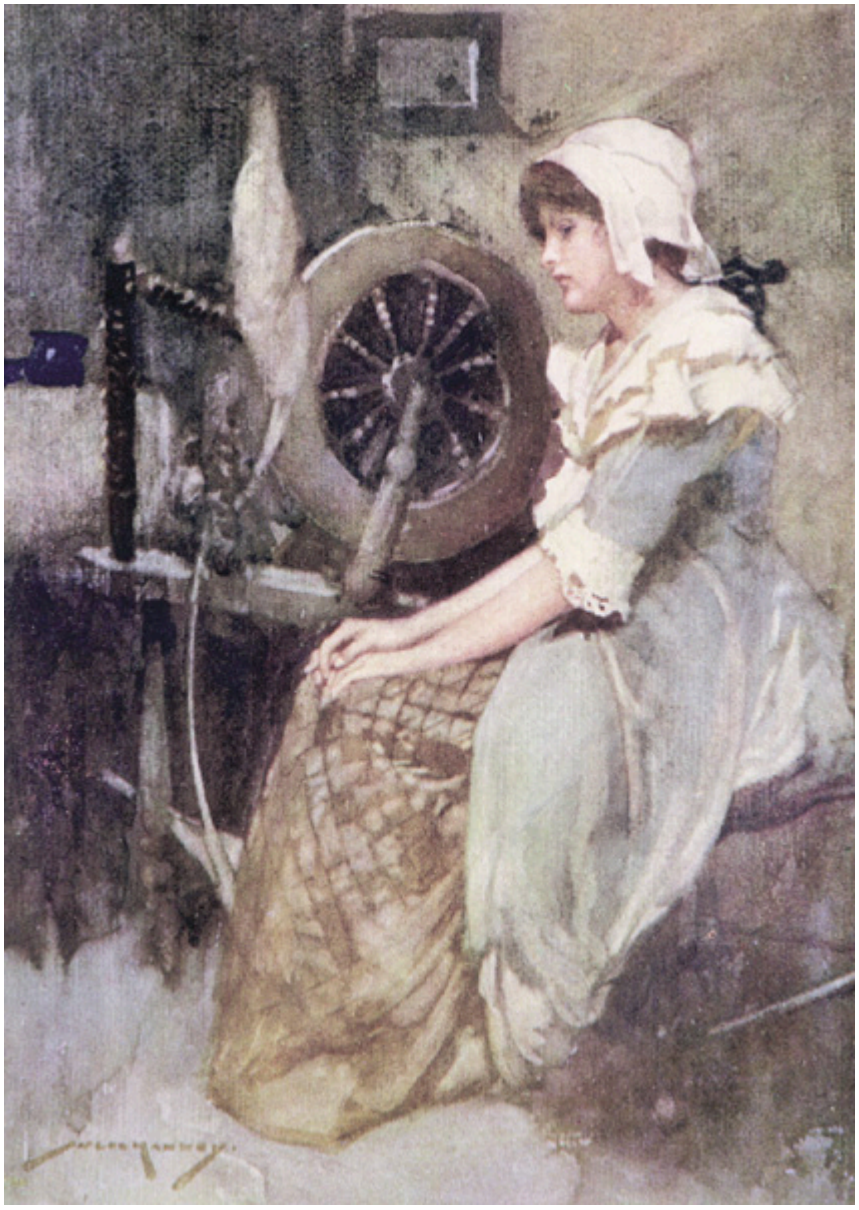
Mortals who wish to avoid unwanted hauntings by Faeries, Elves and Goblins should make copious use of the following items, all of which are proven to bestow protection:

Bells, whistlers and clappers
Prayers, hymns and the sign of the cross
A branch of rowan wood or a bunch of its ripe berries
Running water, a sprinkling of salt; best of all, the salty water of the sea
A well-swept house
Fire or a lighted candle.

There was an old fellow that used to come by telling stories,
and my grandmother had this tale from him.
Storyteller's justification, Scotland

A farmer's son, out late at night, was overcome by a strange rushing sound, like a flock of low-flying, yet invisible birds. Then he heard something falling in the sheep pen behind him. Turning, he saw a small flint arrow beneath the litter on the floor – and realised that one of the sheep had dropped dead.

Some months later a travelling tailor called at the house to make the family's new clothes. As he stitched away, he said to the lad: 'Remember that sheep of yours which died mysteriously a few months ago? Well, at the time I was the captive of Elves who forced me to fly with them every night and fire Elf-Shot at Mortals they disliked. They ordered me to aim some shot at you – but I managed to divert it to the sheep instead.'



The Good People's Shawl

· *Isle of Man* ·

The Good People’s Shawl

There was once a farmwife who, being sick of endlessly spinning the wool from her husband’s large flock of sheep, engaged a girl called Murra to help her. When she was certain that Murra was competent, the farmwife put on her Sunday frock, tied the ribbons of her bonnet and sent for a carriage to take her to town.

‘Here’s a sack of wool for spinning,’ she said to Murra. ‘Make sure it’s all finished by the time I get home at nightfall, because the weaver’s coming to collect the skeins tomorrow. He’ll be furious if they’re not ready – and so will I!’

She flounced out of the door, leaving poor Murra sitting at the spinning wheel in despair.

‘I’ll never get through all that today,’ she thought. ‘Even if I work really fast without a break, I’ll only manage a quarter of it. She’s worse than a slave driver! Whatever can I do?’

She got up, tears pricking her eyes, and went to the window, gazing out at an old hawthorn tree in the garden. Its leaves were dancing, even though there was no wind.

‘It looks as if the Good People are abroad today,’ she thought. ‘I wonder if they would help, in return for the buttermilk and soda cakes I leave out by the fire for them every night.’

She went outside and began to tiptoe round the hawthorn. ‘Please help me with my spinning,’ she whispered. ‘Please, please!’

Once, twice, thrice she circled the thorn tree, bemoaning her impossible task and pleading for help. Four times, five, six, seven ...

‘I hear you, Murra!’ a voice called at last.

Something shuffled on the far side of the wall. Then a grinning, but hideously ugly man came lumbering over it, covered from head to toe in coarse brown hair. He jumped down and stomped towards her, holding out his hands in greeting.

The Phynnodderee!

Murra gasped and curtseyed, wide-eyed.

'I've watched you, Murra,' the Phynnodderee said. 'You're a hard-working lass, the best kind of Mortal. Now then. Go back to the house, prop open the door and shout: "My seven welcomes on you, magic spinners!" After that, scram! Take a walk until you see the moon rising over the mountains, then you may return to the kitchen. But before you enter, make sure you call out, "My seven blessings on you, magic spinners!" Then you will see what you will see.'

Murra wasn't the type to skive, and she was terribly afraid of her mistress. But everyone knew that the Phynnodderee was trustworthy, so she decided to take his advice.

She carried out the prescribed ritual, then went for a walk. When the pale moon began to rise in the autumn sky, she returned nervously to the farmhouse. Noisy clicks and hums greeted her approach. She tried peeping through the window to see what was going on; but someone had stretched a pale, cloud-like curtain right across it. Murra took a deep breath and flung open the door.

The kitchen was full of tiny Good People! Each was dressed in a red cap and a green jacket, and seated before a whirring, blurring spinning wheel.

'My seven blessings on you, magic spinners!' cried Murra.

At once the Good People all jumped up. They tossed their neat skeins of wool onto the table – hundreds of them, thousands – lifted their spinning wheels onto their shoulders and, without a word, trooped out past her into the night.

Scarcely had the last one departed, than the farmwife came riding home in the carriage. She was astonished to find all the wool already spun, for she knew full well that the task was impossible. She peered at the skeins suspiciously.

'Ach, they're all wound up in uncanny patterns!' she complained. 'This isn't your own work, Murra – you've been conniving with Themselves, haven't you? You little sinner!'

Murra blushed. ‘You’re right, mistress,’ she admitted. ‘But haven’t they done the spinning splendidly? And they didn’t cause any harm.’

‘Oh didn’t they?’ said the farmwife. ‘Then what’s that blocking up my nice clean window?’ She marched over to the cloudy curtain and tried to drag it down, but it remained stuck fast. ‘Get rid of this Faery muck at once, girl, or you’ll get a whipping!’ she shrieked.

Murra went to the window. At her touch, the curtain fell away, light as thistledown. She laid it carefully on the table. It shimmered and glimmered. Soft, earthy colours spread across it, shades of heather and harebell, bracken, lichen and moss – a beautiful, lacy shawl.

The farmwife snatched it up and draped it round her bony shoulders; but at once the lace coarsened and the colours darkened into the blackness of a bog.

‘Ugh, it’s cursed!’ she screeched. ‘Take it away girl! Get out of here! I’ll not have folk meddling with Themselves on *my* premises!’

Murra put on the shawl herself, and it softened again into the gentle earth hues. She was still wearing it as she walked out of the farmhouse without a backward glance, for she knew that Mortals given gifts by the Good People are blessed with luck. She would never need to work for a churlish mistress again!

A Brewery of Eggshells

· *England* ·

A Brewery of Eggshells

A widow had two sons. The eldest was a fine, strapping, capable lad – the type to make any mother's heart glow with pride. The other child was much younger and, unfortunately, within a few weeks of his birth, the family started to worry about him, for he suddenly turned very lethargic and ill tempered.

The widow was sure something was seriously wrong with him, but none of the doctors she consulted could explain it. He was always starving hungry and ate his mother almost out of house and home; yet as the months and years went by, he never grew any bigger. He sprouted ugly hair all over his body. He screamed and groaned all day long, refusing to be comforted. He would not even try to walk or stand up or even crawl, but had to be carried everywhere, even though his legs were so strong he could kick a ball right across the room while lying on his back. He never tried to talk – not even a single word. He just lay curled up in his cradle, day after day, year after year, growing ever more grotesque and irritable.

As soon as the older brother grew up, he left to become a soldier. His mother missed him sorely, but she didn't blame him for going out into the world, for what young man wanted to be stuck in a home dominated by a cranky little brat?

Now the mother had no one to help her, but she got used to it and made the best of things, as mothers always do. After a few years, she was overjoyed to get a letter from her elder son saying that the most recent war he'd been fighting was over, and he was on his way home for a while. A few days later, he walked jauntily through the door and gave his mother a big hug. Then he looked around the room.

'Where's my brother?' he asked.

‘In the cradle as usual,’ she answered grimly.

‘Not still?’ he cried in disbelief. ‘A big lad like him? Or have you had another baby boy since I went away?’

‘Of course not,’ she said, tears welling in her eyes. ‘He’s just the same as before you left: never growing any bigger, constantly poorly and having tantrums. I don’t know what to do.’

The young soldier went over to the cradle and peered at the child inside it. He was sleeping fitfully, snoring loudly and twitching as if fleas were jumping all over him.

‘What an ugly monster!’ the soldier said. ‘But … I’ve been thinking about things, Mam, and I’m sure that’s not really my brother.’

His mother sniffed wretchedly. ‘Don’t be daft. Who else could it be, eh? He’s the same boy that’s lived here since he was born.’

‘But he was different when he was born,’ said the soldier. ‘I remember him clearly at just a few days old: he was a bonny little thing with a strong grip and bright eyes. And then he suddenly turned feeble and colicky. By the time I left home, you’d tried every remedy the doctors could think of, hadn’t you, and none of them cured him. I’ve learned things since I went out into the world, Ma, and I reckon this is a Faery Changeling.’

‘No!’ the mother cried.

‘Well, we’ll try an experiment to see if I’m right,’ said the soldier. ‘Can you spare me an egg, Ma? And do you by any chance have some malt and hops?’

She fetched an egg from the parlour. It so happened that, knowing her elder boy was on his way home, she had brewed some ale specially for his arrival. Still having some of the ingredients left over, she fetched these too.

‘Make yourself comfortable in your rocking chair, Ma,’ the soldier said, ‘and let’s see what I can show you.’

He took the egg, made a small hole in either end and blew out all the contents. Then he carefully pushed some malt and hops into it, placed it in a small kettle and hung the kettle over the fire.

As he worked, the child in the cradle woke up and began to fidget, poking his grotesque head over the edge to watch what was going on.

The malt and hops began to bubble inside the eggshell; and the next minute the soldier and his mother heard a most unexpected noise coming from the cradle. The sickly child let out a piercing laugh. And then, oh wonder of wonders, he began to talk! Yes, he who had never deigned to

utter a single word in all those years spoke a complete and perfect sentence! But not with the voice of a child or even a youth; no, he spoke with the rasping croak of a drunken old man:

Ha, ha, ha!
Though twice seven years I've lived with you,
and seven hundred years before,
a soldier brewing beer in an eggshell
is the daftest thing I ever saw!

The astounded mother stared at the creature she had nursed all these years in horrified disbelief.

'There, Ma,' cried the soldier. 'You see, I was right. He *is* a Changeling. Don't worry, I know how to get rid of him!'

He dashed over to the cradle and shook it hard. The Changeling jumped out with a weird shriek and went prancing round the room. The soldier chased after him and, pulling off his belt, began to whip the Changeling, over and over. What with the belt slip-slapping about and the Changeling shrieking, it was more than the poor mother could bear.

'What have I done to deserve such pain?' she wept. 'It's true, when I gave birth to my younger son he seemed like a little angel in my arms ... And then suddenly he changed into *this*! I wish I could have my real child back!'

She closed her eyes and stopped her ears with her hands and buried her face in her apron, sobbing bitterly.

By and by, she felt someone gently touching her arm. Nervously, she looked up. She saw the soldier kicking the Changeling out of the door with a disdainful shout ... And a strange, very handsome youth standing beside her.

The youth was looking at her with great concern. She didn't recognise him; and yet there was something about his eyes and his mouth that seemed very familiar.

'Ma?' he said uncertainly. 'Is it you? Did you call me?'

'You're not ...?' she cried. 'You are! You're my own younger boy! My dear child, where have you been all this time?'

'I've been living with the Faeries, Ma,' he answered.

She jumped from her rocking chair and flung her arms around him. 'Are you all right? Why did you go away with them? Oh, my son, why did you make me suffer so long without you?'

‘I had no choice, Ma,’ he said. ‘They took me from you when I was too young to protest, and by the time I realised what had happened, it was impossible to escape. But don’t worry, they cared for me very well. I lived in a fine palace and was given only the very best food and drink. In fact, to tell the truth, I hardly wanted to leave – until I heard you calling me. Then I longed so much to see you again that I managed to break free.’

Thus the mother and the young soldier welcomed the youngest child back into their family. The two brothers took the Changeling’s cradle outside at once, chopped it up and burned it. And after that, by all accounts, the three of them lived happily ever after.

Thomas the Rhymer

· *Scotland* ·

Thomas the Rhymer

There was a cocky young fellow called Thomas, who had two great passions in life. One was for making music; and the other was for making love.

One morning he took his harp to the edge of the forest and sat down to practise some ballads that he hoped would charm the local girls. To his surprise, he was rewarded almost instantly by the sight of an exquisitely beautiful noblewoman riding out from the trees towards him. She was mounted upon a milk-white horse and dressed entirely in green.

Thomas jumped eagerly to his feet and made his most gallant bow; but the noblewoman waved him away.

'Stay!' she cried. 'Play some more of that wonderful music – and in return, I will give you anything you ask for.'

What an opportunity! But Thomas didn't have the sense to ask for a hoard of treasure or a castle. Instead he brazenly returned her gaze with a mischievous wink.

'Anything, eh lady?' he smirked. 'Well, I bet you won't give me what I *really* want. Never mind, just a single kiss will suit me fine.'

'Continue to play so well,' the lady answered smoothly, 'and I promise your wish will be granted. But before we seal this bargain, you should be aware of the consequences. For I am no ordinary woman: I am the Queen of Elfland. And as soon as your lips touch mine, you will fall into my power. Then I will take you prisoner and spirit you away to my realm for seven whole years. Do you still want to go ahead with your request?' Thomas looked longingly at her luminous skin and the bewitching smile dancing in her amber eyes. 'Of course I do,' he said. 'It sounds like a dream bargain to

me. Don’t bother to imprison me, lady: I’ll go anywhere with you, more than willingly!’

He seized his harp and plucked the most splendid, romantic melody of his whole life for her. As the last note faded away, the Elf Queen dismounted. Thomas threw down his harp, snatched her in his arms and pressed his lips hungrily against hers.

Almost at once, she drew away, commanding him in a stern voice to get on the horse behind her. He did so eagerly. They rode together out of the sunshine, deep into the shadowy forest and then to its furthest edge. From there, they galloped on over endless moors and mountains, until finally they entered Elfland – a country of such wonder that no words exist to describe it.

There the Elf Queen told him, ‘From now on you are my slave and must do everything I tell you. Furthermore, you must not speak to me – or to anyone else in Elfland. Do not dare to disobey me even once. For I must warn you that many other foolish young men have come here before you, and each one failed me. In punishment I used them all to pay my tithes to Hell.’

So Thomas surrendered to her totally, and took care to hold his tongue. Apart from that, he found her orders not burdensome but delightful. Indeed, when he successfully completed his seven-year servitude and it was time for him to leave, he was overcome by sorrow.

Before sending him away, the Elf Queen led him through her orchard to a tree smothered in shimmering golden apples. She picked one and pressed it into his hand.

‘You are the first Mortal to serve me faultlessly, Thomas,’ she said. ‘Here is your reward. As soon as you taste this enchanted fruit, your tongue will speak only the truth, and your heart will know the future. Treasure this gift. For I will watch you; and if you use it well, in time I will send a messenger to call you back to my side.’

Then she snapped her fingers, bringing down a white mist that shrouded the orchard and sent Thomas into a deep swoon.

He woke to find himself alone, lying in the very spot where he had first met the Elf Queen, dazed and ravenously hungry. Finding the golden apple in his hand, he gobbled it down, forgetting its bewitchment until it was

finished. By then it was too late, for he was immediately struck by a disturbing intuition of difficult times ahead.

He shrugged it off and, finding his strength miraculously returned, rose and hurried down the road to his village. There he was greeted with astonished stares and gasps:

'Hey, Thomas – is it really you?'

'Wherever have you been?'

'We thought you were dead!'

Excitedly, he told them all about his adventure, describing everything that had happened absolutely truthfully – for nourished by the magic apple, he could not now exaggerate or lie.

But not a single soul believed him.

It did not take Thomas long to realise that his new gifts were really a curse which made normal life impossible. His premonitions weighed him down with the knowledge of impending tragedies. His outspoken truths turned old friends into enemies. He couldn't even persuade a girl to lie with him any more, since he had forgotten his old, seductive flatteries and instead found himself blurting out his brute intentions in the crudest possible way.

Everyone avoided him. He grew lonely. He became a jobless drifter, a vagabond, an oddball. Left to his own devices, devoid of company, he started talking crazy nonsense, and endlessly chanting ridiculous rhymes:

Tumble down
Twisted thorn
Skinflint merchant
Flop and mourn.

'Shut up, lunatic!' people mocked him. 'Get lost, you madman!'

But a week later, there was a very curious coincidence: a threehundred-year-old hawthorn tree was struck down by lightning; and the following day the most miserly businessman in the village was declared bankrupt.

By then, Thomas was endlessly ranting a new rhyme:

Storm-wind blow
Grasses bend
Golden crown
Gruesome end.

The next day, a violent gale blew up; and that very night, the King contracted a dreadful illness and died in his bed.

Then his tormenters realised that Thomas was not mad, but gifted with the Second Sight. People started queuing up to ask his advice. Earls and bishops puzzled over the secret meanings of his many cryptic rhymes. News of his talents spread far and wide. He became immensely rich.

But it didn't do him any good. For like all Mortals who return from visiting Elfland, Thomas was slowly pining away. His eyes grew hollow, his skin pale as bones, his dreams haunted by the Elf Queen.

One Midsummer midnight, a curious moon-white deer stag was seen lingering outside his house. It must surely have come for Thomas; for after that, he was never seen in this world again.

And see not ye that bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.
'But, Thomas, ye maun hold your tongue,
Whatever ye may hear or see,
For, if you speak word in Elflyn land,
Ye'll neer get back to your ain countrie.
Ballad, Scotland, nineteenth century

The Magic Ointment

· *England* ·

The Magic Ointment

Betty and Tom had a huge brood of children, which should have put them at the heart of the village; yet all the neighbouring families kept out of their way. You see, there were rumours of weird goings-on at their house. People claimed that their rooms were always thick with nauseatingly perfumed smoke, and that absurdly dressed folk went wandering through them, talking gibberish.

However, Old Joan chose not to believe this, for she was a widow and childless, and Betty was the only villager who ever bothered to visit her. One market day, she decided to return this kindness by calling on Betty and offering to fetch some errands for her.

Betty and Tom's children were either at school or truanting down by the river, for there was no one around as Old Joan went up the path. She couldn't help thinking about those rumours, so before knocking on the door, she took a sneaky peep through the latch-hole for any sign that they might be true. Everything looked normal and ordinary until Betty and Tom came into the hall. Betty opened a small pot she was carrying, smeared some green ointment onto her finger and rubbed it gently around both of Tom's eyes.

'Whatever's *that*?' Old Joan wondered to herself. 'Maybe it's what makes Tom's eyes so dark and shining.'

When Betty and Tom went back into the kitchen, Old Joan knocked on the door as if she had only just arrived. Betty opened it herself and beamed with delight when Old Joan asked if there was anything she needed from the market.

'That's so sweet of you, Joan, but I'm well stocked at the moment, thank you. Why don't you pop in for a cuppa before you go on your way?'

So Old Joan went in, a little bit nervous and a little bit curious. Betty showed her into the parlour and went to put the kettle on. There was no sign of Tom; but on a shelf right in front of her, she saw the pot of ointment that Betty had applied to his eyes.

What a temptation! The parlour door was shut tight and there was no one outside the window. Surreptitiously, Old Joan went to the shelf, took down the pot, dipped in her fingertip and dabbed some ointment around her right eye. Then, quick as a blink, she put the pot back and sat down again, composing her features into a bland smile.

She felt a burning pain in the eye. Fortunately this quickly subsided, only to be replaced by a totally unexpected effect.

It was as if curtains had been opened. For suddenly she could see that, far from being the only occupant of the parlour, she was actually sharing it with a crowd of tiny, high-spirited Spriggans! They were spinning on ropes made of plaited cobwebs that dangled from the rafters. They were riding mice in and out of holes in the skirting board, using Old Joan's shoes as jumps. They flew on birds, back and forth through the open window. Some played fiddles and pipes, filling the room with eerie music. Their clothes were all green and red: the ladies clad in old-fashioned velvet dresses and steeple hats; and the men in feathered caps, high riding boots and spurs.

Old Joan blinked frantically and started to tremble. Cautiously, she covered her right eye with her hand. At once all the Spriggans disappeared. But when she took her hand away, there they all were again.

Just then, Betty came in carrying a teapot and cups on a tray. Old Joan smothered her impulse to confess what she had done, instead sipping her tea and making polite conversation about the weather. She tried to fix her gaze on Betty and ignore the stately parade of Spriggans that she could now see crossing the room, bowing and curtsying at Betty, throwing bunches of hedgerow flowers into her lap. She tried not to notice that Betty's ragged dress and grubby apron had been miraculously transformed into a very smart gown. She paid no heed to the Spriggans scowling at her.

Finally she couldn't bear it any longer. 'I'd best be on my way,' she said.

Betty showed her to the door, the Spriggans crowding around her.

What a relief it was for Old Joan to step outside into the fresh air! There were no Spriggans out here, thank goodness. She walked lightly up the garden path; then stopped. 'I wouldn't mind one last sight of them,' she thought. So she crept back and put her right eye to the latch-hole ... and

there they all were again. ‘Oh my goodness,’ thought Old Joan, ‘they’ve set up a banquet!’ For a long table had appeared in the hall, laden with sumptuous dishes. The walls were hung with tapestries and a group of miniature lords and ladies were milling around. ‘I’m imagining it!’ thought Old Joan. So she put her other eye to the hole, and sure enough, all she could see was an ordinary cottage hallway with nothing in it but a threadbare rug.

Old Joan shook her head and dragged herself away. It took much longer than usual to reach the market, because she kept seeing Spriggans and Small People running across her path; and when she went along the cliff tops, she could hear Mermaids singing in the bay far below.

But she arrived at last and managed to do all her shopping without any more disturbing visions. It was autumn and, by the time she had finished, dusk was already falling, shrouding the market with indigo light. Old Joan hitched her overflowing basket over her arm, but before she could turn onto the path home, she saw Betty’s husband, Tom, hovering by the main stalls.

She was about to go over and say hello, when she realised that he was behaving very oddly. He was flitting from stall to stall, putting out his hand and snatching items off each one. Even odder, all the stallholders seemed totally oblivious to him, as if they didn’t care – or couldn’t see him.

Old Joan was outraged. Up to that moment, she had always refused to believe the malicious gossip about Betty and Tom being devious scroungers, so she was devastated to see that it was true. She put down her basket and, hands on hips, marched over to confront him.

‘Tom!’ she cried. ‘Fancy thieving like that! You should be utterly ashamed of yourself.’

Tom spun round, an insolent sneer on his face. ‘So it’s *you*, Old Joan,’ he said softly. ‘But ... which eye do you see me with?’

Old Joan certainly wasn’t going to answer a thief’s question! However, her right eye was itching terribly, and she couldn’t stop herself from wiping her hand across it.

Tom’s sneer broadened into a grin. He pointed his finger closely at her right eye, blew a rancid breath at it and hissed:

You cursed old spy
No more peep or pry
With that charmed eye!

At once, her eye began to burn, just like when she had smeared the ointment into it. Tom seemed to fade away like a coil of mist ... And then the vision in it was gone.

Old Joan staggered about in despair.

‘Quickly!’ she screamed. ‘Catch that man – he’s a thief – and he’s just attacked me!’

But no one else could see Tom. ‘Aw, be quiet, you drunken old baggage!’ the stallholders yelled back.

Poor Old Joan! She had to make the long journey home not only purblind, but also knowing that she had just lost the only friends she had ever had in the whole village.

Flying with the Faeries

· *England* ·

Flying with the Faeries

A boy once got lost in a great forest, wandering here and there with increasing desperation. At last, too exhausted to go any further, he sank down between some gnarled tree roots and fell asleep. When he awoke a few hours later, he was greatly alarmed to find a huge brown bear lying next to him.

The beast did not touch him, but arose and lumbered off down a narrow path into the thicket. After going but a short way, it stopped and looked back, as if inviting the boy to follow. At first the boy hesitated; but lacking any other plan, he resolved to place his trust in the bear and set off after it.

They proceeded in single file through a tangle of trees and brambles until they reached a clearing in which there stood a simple turf hut. As they approached it, the door was opened by an ancient Faery woman, no taller than a three-year-old child, who smiled welcomingly and drew the boy gently inside. The bear, however, turned and hurried back into the forest.

The Faery bade the boy take a seat beside another equally old and tiny woman of her own race, who was warming her feet by a merry fire. The two shared a hearty supper with him, then retired to a broad bed, beckoning the boy to join them in their slumbers. He lay between them with some trepidation; until a clock ticking loudly upon the mantlepiece suddenly struck midnight, at which the Faeries both sprang up with excited cries.

Each seized a white cap from the bedpost and fitted it firmly onto her head. The first Faery then uttered in a warbling voice:

Here's off!

To which the other responded:

Here's after!

And at once they both shot up into the air, dived into the fireplace and disappeared up the chimney!

The astonished boy, afraid to be left alone in this isolated house, daringly seized a third cap from the bedpost and put it on, repeating the words he had just heard:

Here's after!

No sooner had they left his lips, than he felt himself scooped up by an invisible force. It whisked him up the chimney after them and deposited him behind the cottage. Here he found the two Faeries engaged in a frenzied dance within a ring of bright green grass, edged with toadstools. They snatched him in and spun him round until he was overwhelmed with dizziness; at which the first Faery cried:

Here's off to a gentleman's house!

And the other responded:

Here's after!

The boy hastily repeated the last phrase and at once a hurricane blew up. It lifted all three off the ground and into the clouds, blowing them far away over the hills. Eventually they descended, landing on top of an ornate roof, where the first Faery cried:

Here's down the chimney!

The second Faery and the boy responded in unison:

Here's after!

Now they were propelled down through soot and darkness. They emerged through an open stove door into a deserted kitchen and ran across it to a trapdoor, which the Faeries eagerly heaved up, leading the boy down some steep stone steps into a wine cellar.

Here they lit a candle and set to work, systematically examining the bottles of wine stacked upon the shelves, pulling out those that took their fancy and dropping them into wooden crates. The boy assisted them industriously, and when they sat down to rest was rewarded generously from a bottle that the Faeries opened for their refreshment. Having never tasted wine before, he was quickly intoxicated and slumped into a drunken stupor.

He came round to find himself alone in the dark, for the Faeries had already departed with their booty and the candle had burned out. He felt his way back to the steps, which he ascended, hoping that he too might escape; but alas, the kitchen was now very busy with servants preparing breakfast –

and their eyes popped out of their heads at the sight of him emerging from the trapdoor.

The head cook questioned him carefully, and the boy did his best to explain truthfully how he had arrived there. However she did not believe a word of it. She dragged him along to the master, for whom the boy repeated his story; but he too dismissed it as nonsense and lies. Moreover, when he discovered that the wine cellar had been ransacked, he realised that the boy was in league with the culprits. He offered to let him go free if he would name his accomplices. However, the boy's insistence that, 'They were Faeries', infuriated him so greatly that he went straight to the magistrate, who immediately declared the boy guilty and condemned him to death.

The day of the boy's execution dawned. As he was led out to the scaffold, a little old woman came elbowing her way through the crowd that had gathered to jeer at him. She begged that the condemned boy should be hanged wearing a special white cap that she had brought for him; and the executioner – assuming that she was the boy's grandmother – readily agreed, placing the cap on the boy's head with his own hands. He then began to tighten the noose; but before he could finish, the old woman placed a matching cap on her own head, shouting:

Here's off!

The boy, despite his terror of impending death, still had sufficient wits about him to respond:

Here's after!

At once, before the astonished crowd, he soared up into the air after the old woman – and vanished!

They landed safely together back at the turf hut in the forest. There the Faeries upbraided him severely for taking the magic cap without asking. He swore a solemn oath never to repeat this misdemeanor, then thanked them profusely for both his exciting adventure and the dramatic rescue. The Faeries were so charmed by his good manners that they easily forgave his transgressions. Taking him outside, they pointed out a broad and sunny path, which led him quickly and safely home.

Notes

It is a very good thing not to be any way
in dread of the fairies,
for without doubt they have then less power
over a person;
but to make too free with them,
or to disbelieve in them altogether,
is as foolish a thing as man, woman or child can do.

Thomas Crofton Croker, Ireland, nineteenth century

Notes

Of Faeries, Elves and Goblins

Tales of Faeries, Elves and Goblins are told in many parts of Europe and Asia, but nowhere are they so abundant and well developed as in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Research for this book uncovered hundreds of different tales, and no doubt there are many more which have never been written down. Naturally, each region has its own traditions, but certain themes recur throughout Britain and Ireland.

It is universally accepted that Faeries are immortal and gifted with supernatural powers. Most can become invisible at will, shape-shift and create various illusions. Some tribes can fly, although authentic folklore Faeries do not sport wings; they levitate instead by means of twigs, bundles of grass or plant stems, a special cap or a set of potent words. Although most Faeries are diminutive, some tribes are at least equal in stature to Mortals. Some enjoy everlasting youth and beauty, whilst others are wizened, elderly men.

Faeries are strongly associated with the earth. Most live under the ground, inside ‘hollow’ hills or in the prehistoric barrows, mounds and raths that dot parts of the British and Irish countryside. They favour fields, woods, mountains, hills and caves; in Wales they are also linked with lakes and in the Scottish islands sometimes with the seashore. There are connections with Mermaids and other water spirits; however, this book concentrates on earth-bound Faeries.

Belief in Faeries has waxed and waned in popularity over the centuries, and their essential characteristics have evolved to suit the tastes of each age.

Ancient Celtic myths and medieval romances in the Arthurian tradition describe them as very similar to high-born Mortals, but with powers of enchantment, illusion and seduction. In the Tudor and Jacobean periods, the secretive, diminutive Faeries of popular folklore came to the fore. In the eighteenth century these were overtaken by the French concepts of Faery Godmothers and stories about them gained strong moral overtones, which are actually most untypical of authentic Faery lore. The Victorian age saw a huge revival of interest in vernacular Faery stories, stimulating a great flowering of artistic work. In the twentieth century Faeries were generally downgraded to fanciful creatures, only suitable for children. But as the twenty-firstst century unfolds, there is a surge of new interest in Faery lore, particularly amongst those young adults who are enthusiastic followers of the ‘new’ fiction, inspired by ancient beliefs.

Hob Thrush

This story comes from the Northumberland village of Elsdon; but tales of a benevolent, solitary, male domestic Faery who does all the chores overnight are widespread throughout Britain. Such creatures are typically about three feet high with brown faces and brown or green clothes; their hair is shaggy, and their garments are either ragged or non-existent. They are usually known as ‘Hobs’ or ‘Brownies’ in Scotland, northern England and the English Midlands; in Wales they are called Bwca or Bwbachod. In south-west England some types of Pixy fulfil a similar role.

Individual domestic Faeries attach themselves to particular households and farms, sometimes remaining there for centuries. They display fierce loyalty to their chosen family, although the slightest perceived insult quickly makes this evaporate. They normally lie low during daylight hours, emerging unseen at night to do any work left unfinished by the householders or their servants. Indoors they undertake the full range of domestic chores; outside they reap, mow, thresh, guard livestock and run errands as needed. Several Scottish Brownies are renowned for venturing out on horseback in the wildest storms, overcoming wind, snow or torrential rain to fetch a nurse, doctor or midwife to save the life of someone in their beloved families.

Canny householders and farmers keep their goodwill by leaving out simple treats of food to be enjoyed in private: favourites include a bowl of creamy milk, honeycomb, a tasty bannock or cake, good bread and ale.

However, there are countless tales – from as far apart as Devon and Orkney – of people who have lost the good services of their Brownie or Hobby presenting him with a well-meant gift of splendid new clothes. He either regards this as an insult; or else seizes upon it as an excuse to retire or move on. His disapproval is often expressed in rhyme, for example:

Gie Brownie coat, gie Brownie sark [shift]
Ye'se get nae mair o' Brownie's wark.

Ha! A cloak and a hood
Hob'll never do mair good

Some Brownies will accept gifts of clothes if they meet their high standards. One in Lincolnshire, who regularly helps a farmer round up his stray sheep, is very happy with the new smock he gets each New Year's Eve, until the farmer cuts his costs by making it out of coarse sacking instead of linen. As the clock strikes midnight, he hears the Brownie chant angrily:

Harden, harden, harden hamp
I will neither grind nor stamp
Had you given me linen gear
I had served you many a year
Thrift may go, bad luck may stay
I shall travel far away.

Thus he vanishes for ever and the farmer never prospers again.

On the other hand, when a resident Faery is more of a hindrance than a help, presenting a gift can be the perfect way to get rid of him. The staff of a County Durham castle are constantly irritated by a Brownie turning the furniture upside down, soiling the linen, spilling food all over the floor and pouring water over the kindling wood. Eventually a new housekeeper makes him a set of clothes and lays them out in the kitchen; this has the desired effect, for he immediately seizes them and leaves.

Local breeds of Brownie and Hob display particular quirks. Herefordshire Brownies like to sit on the hook from which an old-fashioned cauldron is hung over the fire. They have a tendency to hide keys, which might be returned if a small cake is left out for them. In Scotland's Western Isles, Brownies are as tall as men and enjoy helping favoured Mortals win games of draughts. Aberdeenshire Brownies have neither toes nor fingers.

Welsh Bwbachod have an aversion to both teetotallers and non-conformist clergymen. The Manx Phynnodderee is big, strong, ugly, uncouth, kind-hearted and sometimes over-zealous in his work; unusually, he is married. In Sussex the Pharisee has a soft spot for hard-working servant girls, sometimes leaving a small silver coin in their shoe while they sleep; but if offended he causes pandemonium in the dairy. The Wag-at-the-Wa' of the Scottish Borders has a long tail, suffers from perpetual toothache and can often be heard chuckling as he swings from the pot-hook during a boisterous gathering.

A Derbyshire story tells of an impoverished, overworked shoemaker who finds that a Hob has sneaked in overnight and sewn a beautiful pair of shoes, which he quickly sells for an exceptional sum of money. The next night, the Hob returns and doubles his output, repeating his help every night after that with increasing productivity, so that the shoemaker is soon earning an excellent income. However, with typical Faery perversity, in the end the Hob makes so many shoes that the shoemaker cannot get into his house.

Midwife to the Faeries

Numerous versions of this story are known throughout Britain and Ireland. As in the Welsh one retold here, most focus on a mature woman summoned in the middle of the night and abducted by a mysterious Faery man; the woman helping at the birth of a Faery or half-Faery baby then settling the newborn child with its mother; the magic ointment applied to the child's eyes which she is forbidden to use herself; the breaking of this taboo on one of her own eyes and thus receiving partial 'Faery sight'; and her eventual punishment for doing so.

In one Northumberland tale, the ointment transforms a cottage into an oak-tree house, and the midwife is blinded by 'a puff of withering breath'; in another it is a doctor who delivers the child, and he is given one box of ointment when he enters Faeryland and a second to use when he leaves, but he only applies the second ointment to one eye, and here too the doctor is blinded in revenge. See the story *The Magic Ointment* (here and the notes here) for a different interpretation of this theme.

In Irish Faery Midwife tales there is usually no magic ointment, and the details are slightly different. A doctor rather than a midwife also stars in one of these, set near Lough Neagh. After successfully supervising the birth, he

is invited to a celebratory feast, but the new mother warns him to refuse all food and drink, thus enabling him to escape safely. He accepts a fee of just five guineas, but on reaching home finds that the Faeries have hidden a diamond ring in his purse which brings him and his descendants much honour, wealth and luck. Another story features a similar feast, which the midwife politely refuses to taste; instead she persuades the Faeries to cure her daughter's leg, which they had mischievously injured a year previously. In a third Irish variant, the midwife is astonished to find her vanished neighbour languishing in Faeryland and helps the captive's husband to rescue her.

A Highlands narrative also omits the magic ointment. Here the midwife is rewarded with whatever gift she would like: altruistically she chooses success in her profession, which is willingly granted.

Fertility and the Faeries' need for human help in conceiving and raising healthy children are important folk tale themes. Related to the 'Faery Midwife' stories are some Scottish tales in which a young mother is given a Faery baby to suckle and raise. Typically, the mother nurses it diligently alongside her own baby, and the Faeries reward her with gifts of rich food and fine clothes for both children, and sometimes pots of miraculous healing salves.

The Bogie's Field

The story comes from Northamptonshire. Bogies are a type of solitary Goblin: they are mischievous, frightening, sometimes dangerous spirits that delight in tormenting Mortals, though they are also slow witted and gullible.

The outwitting of a malevolent Faery is a popular story theme. Successful Mortals must combine an understanding of Faery behaviour with cunning and common sense. A Cornish tale tells of an old woman regularly disturbed by a band of Spriggans, who use her cottage to divide up their treasure. One night, as they are absorbed in their spoils, she 'turns her shift' (i.e. turns her nightgown inside out), a charm well known for repelling Faeries. The Spriggans are forced to flee, leaving all their riches behind. However, they get some revenge, for henceforth whenever she wears the shift she is afflicted with agonising pains.

An Aberdeenshire story features a woman, renowned locally as a master baker, who is abducted by Faeries to make one of her famous cakes for them. She tricks them into bringing her cat, dog, baby and husband to help

her, creating such a commotion that the agitated Faeries willingly allow her home to complete the task in her own kitchen. She leaves the finished cake by their mound, and strikes a bargain with them to do this every week thereafter, in return for a bag of gold.

Edain and Midhir

According to Celtic mythology, the Tuatha de Danann of this story were a tall, heroic Faery tribe that once roamed the hills of ancient Ireland, alongside Mortal warriors and kings. Unlike other Faeries (and despite Midhir's boast in the story), the Tuatha de Danann did not enjoy absolute immortality, for they could be killed in battle unless protected by special charms. Tradition says that they were eventually conquered by human invaders, and forced to take refuge in grassy hills or underwater lands, where they dwindled and evolved into the Daoine Sidh, the diminutive Faeries of modern Ireland.

A very ancient version of this story says that Midhir ruled over a sīdh (mound) called Bri Léith and that Edain (Étain) is a Mortal girl with whom he falls in love whilst still married to Fuamnach. When Edain is whisked away by the magical wind, she is initially rescued by Oenghus, god of love, who manages to give her back human form from dusk to dawn. However, that does not save her from being blown into the cup of wine drunk by the wife of King Etar of Ulster. Midhir searches for 1,000 years before finding and abducting her. Another very old account has the added complication of Edain, though married to Eochaid, being coveted by his younger brother who falls ill with longing. It turns out that Midhir has contrived the affair in an attempt to lure her to a secret tryst.

Whuppity Stoorie

This story, from Dumfriesshire, bears a strong resemblance to several English stories.

From Suffolk, *Tom Tit Tot* tells of an incompetent peasant girl married to a king who believes her to be a champion spinner. When he sets her the impossible task of spinning five skeins of flax a day for a month, a Goblin comes to her rescue, but threatens to seize her in return for her labours, unless she can guess his name. The full story is told in the companion volume to this one, *English Fairy Tales and Legends*. There are two parallel Cornish tales: *Duffy and the Devils* features a girl helped by a spirit called

Terrytop, who goes up in smoke at the end; whilst in *Foul-Weather* a Goblin helps a king to build a cathedral, in return for the king's heart. However, the Goblin agrees to forfeit this prize, if the king guesses his secret name. All these are closely related to the well-known German fairy tale, *Rumpelstiltskin*.

Sightings

There are two broad groups of Faery tribes, both known throughout Britain and Ireland, and sightings of them tend to occur in different circumstances. 'Solitary Faeries' are most usually seen in domestic circumstances, as in *Hob Thrush* and similar stories (here and the note here); though they may also be chanced upon out of doors as in *The Leprechaun's Trick* (here). 'Trooping Faeries', on the other hand, live and appear in multitudes, and are most commonly seen dancing in the open air, glimpsed through doors into the hollow hills; or in processions (known as the 'Faery Rade') on auspicious dates or times of day. Mortals who obtain the 'Faery sight' (here and here) may also observe them lurking around local markets and stealing goods. Sometimes these Faeries hold their own markets, clearly visible in the distance but vanishing on close approach, though human voyeurs may realise they have arrived at one when invisible elbows start to jostle them.

There are countless anecdotes about people who sincerely claim to have seen and encountered flesh and blood Faeries. Although in recent decades such visions have been dismissed as childish fantasies, a high proportion of sightings through the ages have actually been reported by adults. Some are firmly embedded in local traditions, like the Welsh legend that every May Day or New Year's Day a secret passage would open up into some rocks, through which anyone who cared to do so could visit a secret Faery stronghold on an invisible island in a lake.

Sightings are typically impossible to verify. Some have a dream-like quality, whilst others are clearly influenced by alcohol or delirium. A Scottish woman goes outside and inadvertently puts her foot on an Elf, which scuttles away with a grunt. A farm labourer in North Wales believes he has caught an otter in his sack – but instead a tiny man dressed in red jumps out of it screaming, 'Let me go! My mother is calling for me!' and disappears into the river bank. A Highland man, henpecked by his sister, returns home inebriated on May Day and claims to have been drinking as a guest of the King of the Little People. A heavily pregnant Manx woman

awakes one night to see a group of Faeries acting out a baptism in her bedroom.

There are numerous tales in which people claim to have caught Faeries, though they invariably escape or die. A Yorkshireman sees scores of Faeries dancing in the moonlight and snatches one into his pocket to show his children; but it has flown by the time he reaches home. A Devon mother is accosted by a Pixy as she returns home at dusk; after 'turning her coat' to protect herself, she grabs him and pops him into her lidded basket, but he too vanishes before she can display him to her family. A Suffolk farmer seizes a Faery – who shrieks: 'Brother Mike, Brother Mike!' – and ties him to his kitchen window, but the creature wastes away. A Cornish man finds a Small Person sleeping on the heath and takes him home. He plays cheerfully with the man's children, promising to show them his buried treasure; however, two more Small People appear, calling for someone called Skillywidden; at which the captive cries, 'Here I am, Mammy!' – and vanishes away with them. Another Cornish family cares for an abandoned Piskie child, who seems to have settled down with them – until one day a voice shouts for, 'Coleman Grey'. 'Aha!' the Piskie says, 'My daddy is come'; and he flies away through the keyhole.

Perhaps the most curious sighting was recorded in Suffolk by the chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall in the thirteenth century. He describes a young brother and sister with curious green skin found near the mouth of a wolf pit. They speak an incomprehensible language and eat nothing but beans. The boy soon wastes away; however, the girl survives and is eventually able to explain that they had inadvertently come to the wolf pit through a cave leading from their own country – a perpetually twilit world inhabited only by green people.

Although Faeries are mostly associated with the earth, it is not uncommon for sightings to occur near the sea. A Lancashire fisherman, becalmed in Morecambe Bay, hears bells ringing under his boat as he drifts to a strange estuary. Venturing ashore, he is surrounded by hundreds of Faeries who lead him to an underground cavern, where he dances to exhaustion and is given a gift of gold. However, he offends them by grovelling at the feet of their queen, so they hurl him back to his boat and send him home. The following year his boat is lost in a gale, prompting locals familiar with his tale to speculate that the Faeries have reclaimed him. Some Cornish smugglers, guarding their loot on the cliffs, spy a group

of Spriggans playing pipes, whistles and tambourines. The smugglers foolishly taunt them, at which the Spriggans shoot up in height and hurl pebbles that burst into flame. Fortunately, the smugglers recall that Faeries fear salt, so they escape by wading into the sea.

Faeries have made their presence felt even in comparatively recent times. A booklet published in 1979, *Pembrokeshire Folk Tales*, describes a BBC Radio reporter tape-recording a conversation with a hill farmer whose premises are supposedly haunted by the Little People. Though most of their conversation comes out perfectly, the tape completely fails to record their discussion in a particular field which the farmer had identified as the main location of Faery mischief.

Yallery Brown

This story comes from Lincolnshire, where benevolent Faery tribes coexist with many distinctly unsavoury groups and individuals, clearly inspired by the flat, once marshy landscape of the Fens. Yallery Brown – apparently named from his distinctive colouring – is a typically twisted, malevolent Goblin, homing in on an innocent Mortal and pretending to offer help, whilst in reality just causing problems.

Another obnoxious Goblin is the invisible female Baobh, based in the Perthshire village of Kirkmichael, who causes the local cattle to catch a fatal disease. She also slaps peoples' faces and sticks needles into them at church services and social gatherings, causing accusations of assault between neighbours and much social disharmony. The villagers eventually manage to imprison her in a cairn of stones – one for every cow she has previously killed.

Ordinary Faeries can sometimes be as cruel as Goblins. A Welshman called Morgan, who lives near the mountain of Cader Idris in Snowdonia, offers generous hospitality to some passing travellers one winter's night, not realising they are really Faeries in disguise. As they leave, they ask what gift he would like in return. He requests a harp, and is given a miraculous one that plays wonderful melodies almost without needing to be plucked. However, the gift is toxic, because when Morgan plays it for his wife and her friends, it compels them to dance ceaselessly until they drop, exhausted, to the ground. He is greatly relieved when the Faeries eventually claim it back.

The Man Who Married a Faery

This is one of the best-known Welsh tales about Faeries, appearing in various forms in most collections. It demonstrates clearly how even the most promising relationships with Faeries are fated to be flawed.

Though the Lake Faery has some qualities of a Mermaid, in common with earth-bound Faery lovers, her form is entirely human; and she is able to mate with her husband to produce healthy children. In some versions, instead of being banned from giving his Faery wife three blows, the husband is warned not to quarrel with her three times; or not to strike her with iron. The latter is a strong Faery taboo, iron being one of the things that they fear most. Whatever the prohibition, it is always broken unintentionally. For example an iron implement or accessory falls against the Faery while she and her husband are bridling a pony; or when he playfully throws a hooked bundle of rushes to her in greeting; or when a horse bolts and the iron bit thrown to stop it inadvertently hits her in the face. The accidental nature of the banned action is typical of the tragedy that imbues relations between Mortals and Faeries, and demonstrates how, despite their best efforts, Mortals are usually the weaker partners.

Many of the stories have a postscript to the Faery wife's disappearance. In one her husband and sons try to drain the entire lake from which she originally appeared in an attempt to find her, but are prevented from achieving this by a monster. Some say that she regularly materialises from the same lake – identified as Llyn y Fan Fach in the Brecon Beacons – on the first Sunday of August each year, rising up, stirring the water and then disappearing, though one source says that this phenomenon ceased in the mid-nineteenth century. Other versions say that she later appears only to her sons, teaching them the use of medicinal herbs, with the remedies preserved in Welsh, English and French manuscripts: they later become the first of many generations of eminent doctors.

A similar story from Beddgelert in Snowdonia tells of a young farmer who sees a group of Tylwyth Teg dancing on a lake shore and falls in love with one of them. He grabs her from the circle of dancers, rushes her home and bolts the door with iron to stop the other Tylwyth Teg from rescuing her. At first she will only agree to be his housemaid, but promises marriage if he can guess her name. After numerous failed attempts, he at last overhears some of her companions discussing her as 'Penelop'; he goes home and addresses her thus, forcing her to keep her promise. She marries

him resignedly and warns him never to strike her with iron. They go on to have a son and a daughter. One morning, as they attempt to catch a headstrong horse to sell at market, they corner it and the farmer throws the bridle over its head, accidentally striking Penelop with the iron fastenings in the process. At once she vanishes and never appears again; although one winter night he hears her tapping on the windowpane and singing to their children.

A common addition to many of these stories is that the couple's half-Faery descendants are easily recognised by their fair, delicate complexions and golden hair.

Across the English border in Shropshire, a well-known medieval story set in the time of William the Conqueror tells how a nobleman, Wild Edric, gets lost whilst hunting in the forest of Clun. At nightfall he approaches some lights in the distance, finds himself outside a very large house and peers through the window to see a company of Faery ladies dancing. Despite fearing enchantment, Edric is inflamed with love for one of them. He finds his way in, snatches her from the circle of dancers and escapes with the help of his faithful page. At first she maintains a stony silence, but on the fourth day she speaks to wish him luck, health, peace and plenty with her as his bride. She warns him never to reproach her on account of her 'sisters' or the place where he found her. Their wedding is a major event and the King himself calls them to London to view the supernatural bride. However, one night Edric is angry that she returns home late, and reproaches her for being delayed by her sisters – only to see her vanish for ever. Local tradition says that they are eventually reunited, and can still be seen riding together through the borderlands.

The motif of a broken taboo, causing a man to lose his supernatural wife, is common in world traditional tales from as far away as Africa. Often, as here, the hero is given three chances before being punished.

Faery Wishes

This story, from Brington in Northamptonshire, is a classic one; for wishes are inextricably associated with Faeries in popular imagination. Here, as in many tales, the gift is not tainted by the Faeries themselves, but by the foolishness of the Mortal recipients.

There is a very similar Welsh story, in which an old woman in an isolated spot gets fed up with her local Faeries constantly 'borrowing' food from her

but never returning it. Finally, when they beg a loaf of bread from her, she persuades them to give her two wishes in return. (Two is an unusual number – in folk tales where a number is named, it is usually three, seven or nine.) Since the woman is constantly falling over a stone by her cottage door, her initial wish is that 'The first thing I touch at the door shall break'. Also, she has bought a piece of flannel to make herself a new jacket, but it is half a yard too short, so her second wish is that 'The first thing I put my hand on in the house shall be lengthened by half a yard.' The Faeries mockingly agree to grant these. At the cottage door she slips, and tries to save herself by putting her hand on her knee, which immediately breaks, fulfilling her first wish. As she limps inside, she feels something tickling her nose, which she scratches – and her nose immediately becomes half a yard longer, in fulfilment of her second wish!

Only Me

This Northumberland story is supposedly a true account of a widow and her son, set in the very rural settlement of Rothley, which also had an old mill reputedly haunted by a whole tribe of fairies who were often seen bathing by moonlight in the nearby river. The story type is known by folklorists as 'Ainsel' from the dialect word for 'my own self'.

Similar tales are widespread in Scotland. One from the Scottish Borders identifies the Faery as a Brownie who comes down the chimney each night to tidy the room, and finds a bowl of goat's milk or cream left out as a reward; when he is injured by a spark from the fire, an 'auld Faery wife' yells down the chimney and he is never seen again.

Further north in Perthshire, a girl runs out of flour in the middle of making her wedding cake. The miller has none left and refuses to grind at night. So the girl goes to the mill herself, lights a big fire, puts a pot to boil on it and sets to work there. At midnight a Brownie enters and challenges her, asking her name; to which she cautiously replies, 'Oh, I'm me myself'. As the Brownie approaches her, the terrified girl tips hot water from the pot over him. He runs outside screaming, and from the wood beyond 'Old Maggy Moloch' demands 'Who has done this to you?'

'Me myself,' groans the Brownie; and then he dies.

'Then I can't take revenge if it was you yourself,' says Maggy Moloch.

There is also a Highland version set in a mill and featuring a Urisk – a rough, hairy Brownie.

The Faeries' Mist-Gate

This story comes from the Cotswolds, the area of rolling hills and farmlands spread mainly across Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire in Western England. The source book uses the spelling 'Fary' to reflect the pronunciation of the word in that region. The story bears an intriguing resemblance to a Russian folk tale, in which a careless young girl is left in charge of her baby brother, he is snatched away to an evil witch and she rescues him in a similarly miraculous way.

Like many stories about Faeries, this one has the feeling of having been experienced in a dream.

Salt and crosses are two universally important protections against Faeries. A church 'Grim' seems to be a little known but fairly benign spirit with an affinity for both Faeries and Ghosts.

Some Faery Tribes of Britain and Ireland

Folk tales about Faeries have been collected from all over Britain, Ireland and the Isle of Man. Some stories are unique to a particular area; others have been told traditionally across the whole region, though sometimes embellished with local flavour. Although such tales often use a local name for the Faeries, generally they all share similar characteristics.

The main difference between the Faeries of each country is their 'political' organisation. Most English Faeries do not have monarchs apart from the Pixies of the West Country. The Scottish tribes are ruled by formidable queens and kings. Welsh Faeries are all considered subjects of King Gwyn ap Nudd of Annwn (the Underworld). Irish Faeries defer to the rule of their warring provincial kings.

Most of the English stories and anecdotes unearthed for this book came from the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland, Durham, Herefordshire and Suffolk; but that may just reflect the tastes of folklorists working in those counties when the first

collections were written down from oral tradition in the nineteenth century. There are numerous well-developed tales from all over Wales, Scotland (including Orkney and Shetland) and Ireland.

For a full list of almost all the known Faery tribes and individuals, see Katharine Briggs' comprehensive work *A Dictionary of Fairies*.

King Herla

This intriguing story dates from a twelfth-century Latin manuscript called *De Nugis Curialium* (Of Courtier Trifles) by Walter Map, an Anglo-Welsh courtier. It demonstrates that even in the early Middle Ages many elements of Faery lore were already well developed: the small size of the Faeries; the unnatural passing of time in the Faery Realms, and the toxic nature of any bargain struck between Faeries and Mortals. The motif of a few days in Faeryland equalling hundreds of years in the real world is a theme that recurs in numerous tales.

The Leprechaun's Trick

Leprechauns are unique to Ireland. They are solitary male Faeries who may be sighted in open countryside or sometimes gardens, busy at work making shoes. They are generally described as child-sized and dressed in eighteenth-century costume with silver-buckled, high-heeled shoes, a leather apron and a three-cornered hat. They have a taste for foul-smelling pipes and beer.

There are various sub-species in different parts of Ireland: the Logheryman in Ulster, the Cluricaun in counties Cork and Limerick, the Luricaun in Kerry and the Lurigadaun in Tipperary.

Leprechaun lore is rather contrary. Superficially it tends to condemn the Leprechaun as a mean-spirited miser who reputedly holds vast stores of treasure in underground crocks. However, most stories tend to leave the reader feeling sympathy for the Leprechaun, for the Mortals who covet his riches are portrayed as callous gold-diggers, prepared to terrify and imprison the Leprechaun in order to steal his treasure. This bad behaviour is never rewarded, for the Leprechaun is a cunning fellow with plenty of tricks up his sleeve to preserve both his life and his wealth.

Leprechaun stories are often told as if true. Thomas Keightley reported several of these in his nineteenth-century book *The Fairy Mythology*. A young woman called Molly Toole sees three Leprechauns making shoes in

the middle of a windswept wheat field. Rooted to the spot with fear, she utters a prayer for God to save her – and when she looks back the little men have vanished. A more brazen woman, Mary Hogan, finds a Leprechaun 'a quarter of the size of a newborn baby' in her vegetable garden. She grabs him and demands his money, threatening him with a knife. As they set off together to fetch it, there is a great noise behind them. 'A swarm of bees!' the Leprechaun shouts. She spins round: there is nothing there, but the Leprechaun has already leaped from her hand and disappeared. A Kilmallock man catches a Cluricaun that he finds hammering away in his stable. 'Loosen your hold so I can get out my purse for you,' the Cluricaun cries. But of course, as soon as the man does so, the Cluricaun jumps away.

Also in the nineteenth century, Lady Wilde tells of a rich and powerful County Roscommon man who claims that he started life as a poor, friendless boy; and that his present wealth originated in a treasure hidden under an ancient fort and revealed to him by a Leprechaun. She also records a grim story of a Leprechaun imprisoned and chained by a boy. The Leprechaun is discovered by the boy's mother, who then violently kicks him out of the house. The Leprechaun lures this woman and her husband to a disused quarry, promising they will find a treasure: there is nothing there, and the woman is punished on behalf of her cruel family by falling and breaking her leg.

Other Faery tribes are also reputed to have stores of treasure. In some tales they share it with Mortals, often in return for a specific service or kindness. However, it always comes with strings attached: for unless the recipient keeps the treasure secret, it turns to dust or leaves, or vanishes. (For further notes on this theme see here).

The Miser and the Spriggans

This tale, from St Just in Cornwall, is a good portrayal of the Faeries' eagerness to punish human greed

Spriggans are an unpleasant, grotesquely ugly Faery tribe mainly found around old ruins and barrows. They are usually diminutive, but have the ability to extend themselves to enormous size. They cause bad weather to spoil crops, and take great delight in intimidating Mortals. By contrast, the subterranean Small People are very beautiful and show great sympathy to favoured Mortals, often paying benevolent visits to the houses of elderly and bed-ridden people. They have secret, perfumed gardens in the cliffs,

full of brilliantly coloured flowers and music, and illuminated at night by twinkling lights.

There is a similar, though less developed, Welsh story about a farmer who sits under a hedge to watch the Faeries dancing, eventually falling asleep. By the time he awakes, the Faeries have imprisoned him in a gossamer shroud, making him invisible to human eyes. The next day his worried family form a search party but fail to find him, even though they pass close by. However, after a day and a night, the Faeries return to release him, but he wanders round in bewilderment for several hours before suddenly finding himself close to home.

Tam Lin

An important source for this well-known story is *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by Francis James Child, collected in the late nineteenth century, and obviously based on much older oral 'performance' tradition.

Child gives fourteen different complete or partial versions of the Tam Lin ballad, all broadly similar. The usual setting is Carterhaugh, a real place near Selkirk in the Scottish Borders. The narrative structures suggest that audiences listening to Tam Lim must have been already familiar with the story, for they tend to concentrate on specific details rather than explaining exactly what happened. The heroine's name is given as Janet, Jenny or Margaret: always a girl of high social rank, and in one version she is the King's daughter. Tam Lin also has noble ancestry: he is variously the son of Earl Randolph of Murray, the Earl of Forbes or Laird Foulis; or the grandson of the Earl of Roxburgh.

The balladeers are less interested in the Faery element of the story than Janet's seduction. They describe how, when she returns to her father's hall after her first encounter with Tam Lin, it is immediately clear to all the court that she is pregnant: she brazenly takes full responsibility for this, adding that none of the men present is the father. In some versions either her sister or brother tries to procure a herb to abort it; but curiously, Tam Lin himself is anxious to protect it and uses his status as the unborn child's father to persuade Janet that she must help him.

Apart from agreeing about the Faery Queen's horrendous curse, the ballads say little about what happens to Janet and Tam Lin after she has freed him; although one – which has a different timescale to the others –

states that she gives birth to a son in the early hours of the morning after that fateful Hallowe'en.

The Goblin and the Sprites

This unique story comes from Essex and has the feel of being based on true events. It is unusual for good and bad Faeries to oppose each other in the same story. The quirky Faery folk here have echoes of other curious creatures found in the neighbouring Lincolnshire Fens and East Anglia.

Dealings Between Faeries and Mortals

The Faeries' strict but perverse ethical code, and their tendency to take umbrage at the least provocation, together form the basis of many stories. On the plus side, they are fair, truthful and benevolent to Mortals who win their favour. Against this, they only keep promises under sufferance and in distorted ways; and they behave callously to those who offend them, inflicting cruel punishments such as poverty, bad luck, illness, injury or even premature death.

There are numerous examples of Faeries punishing people who irk them. A Cornish woman tries to stop the Small People stealing milk from her cow by rubbing its udders with salt; the Small People retaliate by making the cow's milk dry up. A Northumberland miller, infuriated by Faeries stealing ever larger shares of his grain, throws a stone into their cooking pot, causing hot porridge to splash and scald them; he suffers debilitating aches and pains for the rest of his life. A Glamorgan farmer, having ploughed up a Faery dancing ring, meets one of their tribe waving a sword and shrieking, 'Vengeance comes!' A few months later, his entire harvest is burned to cinders in the field.

Faeries do not just steal Mortal goods: they also abduct people. Their preference is for babies, young women, young men and nursing mothers,

suggesting that they need Mortal genes and human milk to fortify their race. In the case of adult abductions, they often leave behind a 'stock' – a replica of the real person. Sometimes this is made of wood; alternatively it may be so lifelike that the victim's family believes it is the real person struck by a stroke or similar illness. The theft of Mortal babies is more complex: this is discussed in the Notes to the story *A Brewery of Eggshells*.

Despite their faults, Faeries can be generous to Mortals whom they favour. Some Devon Pixies, delighted by a Devon woman's garden tulips, enchant them to flower all year round, and when she dies they tend her grave with wild blossoms. A Worcestershire man mends a Faery's seat and is rewarded with biscuits, wine and never-ending good fortune. A shepherd in Snowdonia who digs a Faery child out of the snow is presented with an exquisitely carved crook that brings luck for as long as he carries it.

Naturally, Faery gifts should never be misused or taken for granted. Another Snowdonia man acquires an enchanted cow that strays away from the Faeries' herd. For years she produces exceptional milk and gives birth to magnificent calves, making the farmer very rich. But when he calls the butcher in to slaughter her, a terrible shriek bursts through the air as the cows and her offspring plunge into a lake. The farmer never prospers again.

Faeries despise laziness, as exemplified by an unemployed Somerset man who refuses to help at the harvest. He is caught one night by Pigsies, who drag him through thorns and brambles until dawn, then push him into a duckpond. They hate slovenliness and untidy houses, and expect Mortals to leave their doors unlocked at night, allowing the Faeries to go in and use the facilities to wash their babies by the warmth of the fire. A Shetland family forgets this rule when unexpected guests arrive. Not having enough beds, their youngest boy sleeps by the hearth and is woken in the night by two grumbling Trows. Since no clean water has been left out for them, they bathe their baby in some oats that are soaking for the morning's porridge, then wash his clothes in the same mixture. A Manx farming couple stops leaving their door on the latch for the Good People on winter evenings. In revenge, the Good People bewitch their butter from churning, destroy their barn and let their sheep loose.

Mindless of their own malice, Faeries demand high standards of courtesy and respect from Mortals; and are grossly insulted if Mortals refuse to believe they exist. A Sussex farmer, spying on the Pharisees who thresh his wheat and oats at night, laughs out loud when one calls to his mate, 'Phew,

I'm sweating!' The outraged Pharisees beat him with their flails, knocking him unconscious: he is dead within a year. Also in Sussex, two labourers hear shouts for help from under the ground. The first man recognises it as a Pharisee, but his mate insists there are no such things. The believer mends the Pharisee's broken tool and is rewarded with a tiny mug of excellent beer; but the sceptic falls ill with a wasting disease and dies.

A Lancashire saying advises: 'Those as get Faery brass given to 'em should tell nobody', for Faeries abhor Mortals who publicise any private bargains between them. A Strathspey farmer who pleases a Faery by singing her favourite song, is rewarded with a bag of seed that remains full no matter how many fields he sows from it; but as soon as he tells his wife about it, the bag empties. A Lancashire milkmaid, working alone in the dairy at dusk, often finds a small jug by her feet with a silver sixpence inside. When she accepts her sweetheart's marriage proposal and tells him about her curious nest egg, the gifts cease. A Montgomeryshire fiddler, harassed by Faeries on the road late at night, plays his fiddle to appease them. Arriving home he discovers a large silver coin inside the instrument. Next day he boasts of his good fortune and uses it to pay for a round of drinks in the pub; but as soon as the landlord puts the Faery coin in the till, it turns to dust.

A common cause of Faery wrath is to infringe their privacy or intrude upon their territory. A Lanarkshire labourer inadvertently exposes a Faery's underground house while digging peat. Passing the same spot a year later, he is surrounded by Faeries who force him to join their dance, then imprison him inside a rock until the grass has grown back over the disturbed house. An Irishman builds a house on a patch of land well known as a Faery dancing place. In the middle of his house-warming party, the Faeries arrive to demolish it. Sensibly, the man apologises at once and completes the demolition himself; he is rewarded with a pot of gold. Not so lucky are the Devon couple who unwittingly build their house with granite from a quarry under the protection of the Faeries; for their baby is stolen while they sleep. Another Irishman builds his house right by a Faery rath.

Within months, his young son can hardly breathe and is having nightmares about Faeries sitting on his chest. He succumbs to a fatal illness, while his parents' farm falls into ruin.

The Faery Borrower

This story comes from the Highlands of Scotland, but ‘borrowing and lending’ is a common Faery theme everywhere.

At a Faery hill near Frensham in Surrey, Mortals often beg loans of useful items from the Faeries: kitchen implements, money, even a yoke of oxen. The ritual is to knock upon a six-foot-long stone on the hill, declaring what they wish to borrow and why; to which an invisible voice responds with the date when the item will be available. Borrowed goods may be kept for up to a year, so long as they are returned on an agreed day. But then someone borrows an unusually large cauldron and trivet and forgets to return it on time. The Faeries refuse to accept it at a later date, so the miscreant donates it to the local church where it is placed in the vestry: it can still be seen there today. Needless to say, the supernatural loans completely cease after the incident. In a Herefordshire story, Faeries bring food for the haymakers on a particular farm each year, until one of the lucky recipients steals one of their knives; again, this causes the Faeries’ generosity to cease.

Other stories from the Scottish Highlands often focus on oatmeal. In one, a mother is rocking her baby to sleep when she suddenly sees a strange noblewoman standing inside her little cottage, dressed in rich green and adorned with gold spangles. She refuses a seat but asks to borrow a little oatmeal. The hostess, whose husband is a miller, gives her an overflowing basin of it: the lady accepts it graciously and promises to return it. On the given date, a smaller woman in green turns up with her own basin of oatmeal, and urges the whole household to taste it. They all comply, except for one young servant lad, who dies soon after. The household assumes that the noblewoman is the Faery Queen.

Faery dogs, sometimes known as ‘Hounds of the Hill’, are usually white with red ears.

The King Of France’s Daughter

The story, from County Mayo, is one of several related Irish ‘Faery mischief’ tales.

The most similar one is *Jamie Freel and the Young Lady*. Here the young hero makes a deliberate attempt to seek his fortune with the ‘Wee Folk’ by visiting a ruined castle at Hallowe’en. The Faeries welcome him into their dance, then invite him to join them on a trip to Dublin to ‘fetch a young lady’. They travel by the same method as in *The King of France’s Daughter*

to abduct a young lady from her bed in one of the richest houses in Stephen's Green, leaving a wooden stock in her place (here). When Jamie rescues her from the Faeries, they attempt to thwart him by turning her into monstrous shapes, as in the Tam Lin story (here) – but he clings on until dawn forces them to relinquish her. She is cursed to be deaf as well as dumb, but is cured when Jamie steals a glass of magic drink from the Faeries. Once they have convinced her parents about what has happened, a magnificent wedding is arranged in Dublin, with a fine coach sent to fetch Jamie's mother. Here too, the hero solves his problem after overhearing the secret solution – a common folk tale device.

The hero of a rather comical third version is not a youth but worldweary Billy MacDaniel, who wishes for a drink to keep out the cold on a winter's night. A Faery man offers him an enormous glass which Billy quickly gulps down. In lieu of payment, the Faery condemns him to seven years' bondage. Billy follows him to a field where they each climb astride a rush from the bog. The magic words, 'Borram, borram, borram!' transform the rushes into horses and carry them away, across country and through keyholes, on a series of adventures. Eventually the Faery announces his intention to abduct a girl from her wedding at a grand house in County Limerick. They fly there and perch on a beam above the wedding feast. When the bride sneezes twice and the priest fails to bless her, the Faery whispers that a third unblessed sneeze will enable him to seize her. However, Billy interferes by yelling: 'God save us!' At this the furious Faery kicks him into the middle of the feast. He is rewarded for saving the bride with an invitation to join in the fun.

The Shetland island of Yell has a less developed variant of this story. A man, stepping outside before going to bed, sees a band of Trows flying past, calling:

Up hors, up hedic
Up will ridn bolwind
An I ken I's reyd among yu.

He repeats the magic words and finds himself flying amongst them, to the roof of a house where a woman is about to give birth. The man, realising she is in danger, listens keenly to what is going on below. When she sneezes, he cries, 'God save you both!' – and at once the Trows all vanish. Had he not done so, the 'unblessed' sneeze would have enabled them to

abduct her as a wet-nurse. The angry Trows raise a storm, which prevents him from travelling home for two weeks.

Flitting

A Boggart is a perverse kind of solitary domestic Faery. This story is well known in both Yorkshire and Lancashire.

There is a similar Irish story from County Cork which tells of a Cluricaun called Wildbean who haunts a cellar. Believing that the creature cannot cross running water, the householder attempts to move home to the far side of a stream. However, the Cluricaun goes with him, hidden inside an empty barrel on one of the removal carts, crying, 'Here we go together!'

A Box of Faeries

The story is set in the Kyle of Tongue in Sutherland. The theme of supposedly 'helpful' Faeries causing trouble to Mortals is a common one, though the plot itself is very unusual.

A Year and a Day in Faeryland

This story comes from Cornwall, scene of many supposed Faery abductions.

One of the best known concerns a young serving maid called Anne Jefferies. One day, sitting under some trees by her employers' garden gate, she is approached by six diminutive Faery men: one speaks to her affectionately, climbs into her lap and kisses her, beckoning his fellows to join him. They cover her eyes, she feels a pricking sensation, is overcome by darkness, then lifted into the air and carried away to a gorgeous land, full of people dancing and sporting. There she slips off with the Faery who kissed her and the sexual promise of her abduction seems about to reach fruition; however they are ambushed by his fellows, a fight ensues and Anne is hastily whisked back to the garden. Those who hear of her adventure initially assume it is a hallucination induced by a fit; but a formal account of her experience is recorded in 1645 and widely believed to be true. She subsequently develops powers of prophecy and a healing touch, leading to accusations of witchcraft and imprisonment.

Although Jenny Purmuen and Anne Jefferies are willing visitors to Faeryland, many Mortals are taken to the Faery Realms against their will and held captive there indefinitely. As we have already seen in the story of

King Herla (here and here), those who do return may be horrified to find that they have ‘stepped out of time’, with a few minutes in Faeryland equating to days, months or many years in the real world. Another example of this phenomenon appears in the tale of a Gwynedd farmer who finds a strange and bewildered young boy on his doorstep, claiming that the farmhouse is his home, to which he is just returning after a short walk. The farmer scoffs – then suddenly realises that the boy must be the hero of a curious local legend about a lad who went missing from his farm over 100 years previously, reputedly after stepping into a Faery ring. In a Pembrokeshire variant, the lost boy returns as an old man: a contemporary recognises him and invites him to share a meal; but as soon as he tastes the food he collapses and dies. A similar Welsh adventurer is shepherd’s son Gitto Bach, who goes missing in the mountains and is not seen for two years, then suddenly turns up on his grieving mother’s doorstep. He claims to have been away dancing to the harps of ‘the Mountain Children’, and is still exactly the same age as he was when he vanished. In Scotland two young Inverness fiddlers are paid twice their normal fee by a weird old man who takes them to perform at a Faery ball at a house in the mountains. They return to discover that 100 years have passed; and as soon as the church bells ring, they crumble away to dust.

There are many tales of Mortals held captive after joining Faery revels. In the Scottish Highlands, brothers Donald and Rory are searching for stray sheep when a rock – a Faery ‘shian’ – suddenly lights up to the sound of jigs and reels. Foolhard Rory enters the open door and is lost to the merrymaking. Donald, following a wise man’s advice, returns there a year and a day later and seizes Rory from the endless dance by shouting the name of God and waving a cross made of rowan wood to break the spell. Rory complains bitterly that Donald has dragged him away after a mere half hour of fun. In a similar Welsh story, a farm servant is threatened with hanging for murdering his companion, who vanished while they were driving ponies home together at twilight. Fortunately he persuades the judge to accompany him to the vivid green grass circle where he lost his friend. As soon as they step into it, they hear extraordinary music and see the missing man dancing with a troop of Faeries. They pull him to safety but he falls into a great melancholy from which he never recovers.

In Scotland specific rituals or challenging ordeals are often required to rescue abducted Mortals. A fourteen-year-old Highland boy, enslaved inside

a Faery knowe and forced to work at a forge, is not released until his father approaches the captors with a dirk, a Bible and a cockerel. An Aberdeen woman called Mary Nelson, kidnapped during childbirth, is freed by her brother shouting for her at midnight, then clinging on to her tightly through a series of horrific shape-shifting visions, which continue until she is released at cockcrow. Her newborn baby is still held captive; but a threat to burn all the thorns on the Faery knowe quickly ensures his safe return. Near the Moray Firth, a young widow slips and hits her head on a cliffside path; coming to, she realises her baby has been stolen by the Sidh. A gypsy wise woman advises she may get him back by offering the Sidh 'something which has no equal'. The widow recalls talk of two mythical wonders: The White Cloak of Nechtan and the Golden Stringed Harp of Wrad, and manages to make convincing representations of these. She barters the Cloak in return for being smuggled into the Sidh knowe, and there exchanges the Harp for her baby.

Sadly, not all attempted rescues are successful. An abducted Lothian wife appears to her husband in a vision, telling him to free her by attending the Faeries' Hallowe'en procession, armed with a bunch of gorse. However, the procession causes him to freeze with terror, and he is haunted afterwards by the sound of his wife's voice crying bleakly, 'You coward, now you have lost me for ever!'

Those not rescued might break free after 'a year and a day' or some other specified period after being carried off (echoing Jenny Purmuen's contract), or on a special date such as Hallowe'en, or by their own efforts. A Suffolk tale describes an invisible spirit called Malekin haunting Dagworthy Castle and claiming to be a Mortal girl snatched by the Faeries from a cornfield as a baby, but promised her freedom after seven years.

Other captives escape by sheer good luck. A boy in Northern Ireland, out alone picking blackberries, naïvely follows some Faeries into their hill. To keep him in their power, they try to remove every trace of the Mortal world from him, replacing his clothes with a set of their own and scrubbing him from head to toe. However, they miss a single bramble thorn caught under his fingernail – which is enough to break their hold on him.

Some benefit from a tip-off, especially if they take care to refuse all food and drink. An Irish girl, enticed to join a Faery dance on a hillside one autumn night, is led underground to a grand banquet. She is about to sip from a golden cup, when a Faery man whispers to her, 'Eat nothing, drink

nothing or you will never see your home again.' She puts the cup down, provoking great uproar amongst the assembly, but is led to safety, with a sprig of ground ivy as a protective charm. Then there is the woman in the Scottish island of Harris, enticed into a rocky cavern where she finds herself surrounded by Faeries and ordered to bake bread for them. They promise she can leave once she uses up all their flour, so she sets to work resignedly. However, after baking a huge batch of loaves, there is still as much flour left as when she started. She is held captive for many days, perpetually baking, with the supply of flour never diminishing. At last an old Faery takes pity and explains how to break the enchantment by simply putting aside the separate sprinkling flour.

Less fortunate is a Cornish girl called Grace Hutchens, supposedly found dead on Selena Moor, but actually abducted by Faeries who leave a stock in her place (here). The truth is discovered some years later by farmer William Noy, once her sweetheart, who gets lost on the same moor, and is led from there by enchantment to a Faery banquet. There he is astonished to meet his beloved Grace, who arrived by a similar route to him: 'Pixy-Led' (here) on the moors to an orchard, where she foolishly plucked a golden plum and ate it, enabling her to be enslaved by the Faeries. Thus warned, William avoids all Faery food and drink, and manages to return to the real world by turning his gloves inside out and throwing them among the Faeries. Grace, however, is lost for ever.

Occasionally Mortals are allowed to come and go from Faeryland fairly freely. A Pembrokeshire shepherd called Einon is led into the secret realms where he marries a Faery princess; but eventually he becomes homesick. The Faery King allows him to visit his home, on condition that he returns to Faeryland on the first day of the new moon. He keeps his promise and eventually takes his Faery wife back to the Mortal world with as much gold and silver as they can carry.

Some Mortals are so taken by Faeryland that they resist all attempts to rescue them. Such is the case of a youth carried off from the Irish town of Granard. A wise man prescribes gifts of the best food and drink to be left out for nine days to appease the Faeries; then creates a spell involving fire, powder and dense smoke. But when the lost youth appears, he insists on staying where he is, for he has taken a Faery bride. A Pembrokeshire youth also longs for permanent residency in Faeryland, but loses the chance due to his lack of self-control. His downfall comes from a forbidden fountain filled

with gold and silver fish. Unable to stop himself from plunging his hands into it, he is whisked back to the cold, rainy hillside where he was originally lost.

Spells

The two seventeenth-century English spells quoted are simplified from manuscripts in the Bodleian Library.

There is a haunting story from the 'Welsh Marshes' – Shropshire and Herefordshire, where England borders onto Wales – of a youth who discovers a spell to summon a Faery, hoping this might bring him wealth and success in a love affair. After several unsuccessful attempts, he finally conjures up a series of three Faeries. Frightened by the first two, he rejects them and is cursed in revenge. He confides his wishes to the third, but due to the curses, forgets to name his sweetheart, or to say that he is willing to work hard in order to become rich. His wishes are granted with typical Faery perversity: he falls into the clutches of a wealthy widow who forces him to marry her then treats him cruelly, whilst his true love dies when a pestilence strikes their village.

The twentieth-century spell appeared in the *Sussex County Magazine* in 1952: the informant claimed to have watched it performed in a woodland clearing by a supposed witch, who chanted the words several times over, all the while rubbing two small branches of catkins in her hand to make the pollen fly like gold dust. The Anglo-Saxon diagnosis of Water-Elf disease' comes from an ancient medical text known as Bald's Leech-Book.

The Faeries' own spells are usually both mischievous and malevolent. One of the worst and most common types is the transformation of a familiar path into an endlessly looping labyrinth. The person afflicted – usually on a simple, oft-trodden journey – is unable to find their way and forced to wander helplessly and foolishly, often for several hours, until the spell is suddenly lifted. This is variously known in different regions as being Pixy-Led or Pouk-Ledden; or in Ireland as suffering The Stray Sod. A well-known antidote is to remove one's coat, turn it inside out, and put it on again.

There are numerous examples. An Irish rector, returning from a sick parishioner on Midsummer's Night, is unable to find the stile out of a familiar field, and walks round the hedge seeking it for hours, until it suddenly reappears. A Devon woodcutter, searching for a tool left behind in

the wood, hears shrieks of laughter in the trees and becomes unable to stand up straight: he has to crawl home, but gets no sympathy from his wife, who scoffs: ‘You should have turned your pockets inside out to stop the Piskies’ mischief!’ A Manx fisherman, desperate to get home quickly, takes a short cut through a notorious glen. As darkness falls, he becomes lost and finds his path blocked by a crowd of the Good People who force him to sing for them all night as ‘payment’ for intruding on their territory; but they vanish at dawn, when he finds his way easily.

The flint or stone arrowheads known as Elf-Shot are said to be fashioned by Faeries in their own forges. Belief in this goes back to at least Anglo-Saxon times. Sometimes diagnosed by a hairless spot or lump in the skin that fails to bleed from a needle prick, it is blamed for many serious diseases and mysterious injuries in both people and animals. One curious Shetland remedy for animals is to press a page torn from a Bible onto the lesion; another is drag a tomcat down the sufferer’s back with claws extended. An Anglo-Saxon charm to cure Elf-Shot in horses recommends using a knife with a shaft made of ox horn and three brass nails to carve ‘Christ’s mark’ on the horse’s forehead and limbs, pricking a hole in its left ear, then striking it on the back with a staff.

Of the numerous recommended defences against Faeries, iron and steel are said to be the most effective. An iron horseshoe hung over the door will safeguard an entire household. A tale from the Shetland Islands tells of a man surrounded by malevolent Trows as he passes a knowe at night. Fortunately he has some steel shears in his pocket, which he uses to mark a series of circles around him. He steps from one circle to the next and thus moves away down the hillside. Though the Trows dance threateningly around him, the steel renders them powerless to seize him.

Almost as potent are the symbols and language of Christianity. Parents who fear their baby may be swapped for a Faery Changeling (see *A Brewery of Eggshells*, here and here) hang open scissors over the child’s cradle, or arrange its safety pins in the shape of a cross (being made of steel, these items offer double protection). A Warwickshire tale tells of a family’s ponies put to graze near an oak wood that is haunted by dangerous Farises. The animals are discovered the next day worn out, soaked in sweat, with tangled manes and wild eyes. They are almost lame from being over-ridden. When the mistress shouts, ‘Go in the name of God!’ a seething mass of dark shapes is seen fleeing and the ponies are troubled no more.

Bells – especially those of a church – can dispel Faeries, bearing comparison with the Asian use of firecrackers to frighten away demons: noise is perceived around the world to cause great discomfort to evil spirits. The rowan tree is a common Faery repellant: in the Highlands it is customary to plant a protective rowan tree outside a rural house.

Negative magic – the avoidance of certain practices – is also important. Thorn trees should not be cut down for they are often used by Faeries; obstructions should not be left on any path or track known to be frequented by Faeries. Buildings must never be constructed on or near any recognised Faery habitation; and any Faery spotted is best ignored.

The Good People's Shawl

Faeries – often referred to as the Good People – are thick on the ground in the Isle of Man. They live in the hills, often near rivers and pools. They demand respect but bring luck to any houses where bathing water and food is left out for them. They love riding and hunting, usually on 'borrowed' Mortal horses.

The Phynnodderee (Fenoderee), who appears in many Manx stories, is a solitary, Brownie-like figure, with a benevolent character, despite his hideous appearance. He is particularly helpful on farms where he works as fast as a whirlwind.

A Brewery of Eggshells

'A brewery of eggshells' is one of the classic ways to identify the true persona of a 'Changeling' – an uncanny creature left in place of a Mortal child whom the Faeries have snatched away. This story comes from Herefordshire, but Changeling stories are widely known throughout England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

A related English tale has the child 'changed' whilst in the care of a wet nurse. A beggar advises the mother to fasten the child in his chair; then to set 24 half eggshells in front of the fire on a well-swept hearth, and to hide behind the door. She does so, and the Changeling announces:

Seven years old was I before I came to the nurse
Four years have I lived since
And I never saw so many milk-pans before.

When the voice fades, she returns to find her own child in the chair.

In a story from North Wales, a wise man advises the afflicted mother of infant twins, that have been ‘changed’, to await harvest time. Following his instructions, she makes a cauldron of good broth, then serves it to the reapers in scooped-out eggshells. At once the two Changelings exclaim:

Acorn before oak we saw
An egg before a hen
Never did we see an eggshell stew
As dinner for harvest men.

The alarmed woman scoops up the creatures and rushes to a lake on the hilltop, intending to fling them into the water; but is stopped by two little men who truthfully assure her that her real children are back safely in their cradles.

The ‘brewery of eggshells’ is just one of many bizarre rituals for dealing with Changelings. Another Welsh recommendation is to hide in the undergrowth by a crossroads when the full moon is four days old to watch a Faery procession, then wring the neck of a pure black hen and roast it over a wood fire until its feathers drop off. Also from Wales comes the formula of placing a spadeful of baked salt by the front door to reverse the exchange. In a Scottish story the bereaved mother is told to heat a cauldron of water and throw a bundle of grass wrapped in a shawl into it. At once the Changeling screeches, ‘Come fetch me quick, Mammy, or they’ll put me in the cauldron and boil me!’ The door bursts open to reveal a Faery woman with the stolen child under her arm, crying, ‘Take yours and I’ll take mine!’ In a Suffolk story a mother forced to care for a Changeling becomes resigned to it and treats it kindly; the Faeries reward her by regularly hiding small amounts of money in her pocket.

In another Scottish story, a baby suddenly becomes hyperactive, yelling constantly, biting his mother’s breast and so on. The mother leaves him in the care of a maid, who complains loudly that she will have no time to do all her other tasks. At this the ‘baby’ immediately sits up and says in an adult voice: ‘If you loosen the cradle-band and check the neighbours aren’t looking, I’ll do everything for you.’ He leaps up and completes all her domestic and farm jobs in no time. When the mother returns he changes back into a fretful infant, but the girl reports what has happened and assures her mistress she can get the real child back. At midnight, she stokes up the fire and tosses the imposter onto the burning coals. His shrieks bring Faeries to all sides of the house, rattling the windows and doors. The maid

shouts, ‘In the name of God, bring back the bairn!’ At this a window flies open and a Faery carries in the stolen baby, laying it in the mother’s lap. The Changeling, meanwhile, flies up the chimney, laughing eerily. A similar Scottish story, known as *Johnnie in the Cradle*, has the Changeling minded by a visiting tailor while the mother is out, sharing a bottle of whisky and playing the bagpipes. On hearing of this, the father heats a griddle of manure over the fire until it is red hot, then tries to throw the Changeling on top; but it escapes by flying up the chimney. In a Highland story, when a Changeling is shoved into an old creel and a straw fire lit underneath, it flies out with an angry shout.

There are numerous variants on this theme from all over Scotland.

In Orkney a wise woman advises the distraught parents to totally ignore their Changeling’s distress. However, when it seems to have a fit – gasping for breath and turning blue in the face – the father gives it a drink of water. On the following night, the same thing happens. But on the third night the parents manage to resist its cries: eventually it rolls out of the cot to the floor with a piercing shriek and disappears up the chimney in a blue flame. Shortly afterwards, they find their own baby sleeping peacefully in his cot.

There has been considerable academic analysis of Changeling stories and their meaning. The supernatural ‘exchange’ is often portrayed as a subtle punishment for failing to conform to accepted parenting mores. The bereaved parent may be a single mother: either a widow or, by implication, unmarried. An early Christian baptism is regarded as the best protection for a baby and many stories mention that this has been delayed through carelessness or for some other reason. There may be indications of neglect, often unavoidable: the mother may have left the child for a few moments to carry out some vital household chore, or put him in a corner of a field while she takes part in haymaking. The implication is that a properly cared for child is unlikely to be ‘changed’ – although in one Scottish story, a mother is punished for boasting about her new baby by losing it temporarily to the Faeries.

The characteristics of supposed Changelings are very similar to the symptoms of various childhood disabilities and congenital diseases, some of which do not immediately manifest themselves at birth: abnormal appetite, failure to thrive, fractiousness and so on. Thus it has been suggested that stories of this kind were used in uneducated communities to

rationalise serious infant conditions such as spina bifida, hydrocephalus, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, Down's syndrome, dwarfism, autism, brain damage, polio or tuberculosis. The 'Changeling' idea perhaps offered a comforting explanation for an originally healthy and happy infant that suddenly became sickly and irritable.

Thomas the Rhymer

This is a well-known story from the Scottish Borders, also called *The Ballad of True Thomas* or *The Romance of Thomas Erceldoune*. The hero was apparently a real man who lived in the thirteenth century. Some versions say he was the Laird of Erceldoune, a hamlet near Earlston; but the retelling here follows the alternative theory that he was a simple cottager called Thomas Learmont. His reputation as a flirt is challenged by one variation that claims he was married with children before being abducted by the Elf Queen.

The oldest surviving written accounts of his adventures and esoteric prophesies date from the fifteenth century, possibly based on even older poems. Other Scottish tales of Mortals who visit Faeryland sometimes mention that Thomas the Rhymer has been sighted there.

The Magic Ointment

This Cornish story presents another angle on the widespread theme of Mortals who obtain the 'Faery sight' (Midwife to the Faeries, here and here). The ointment reveals a parallel world, suggesting that, if everyone were granted this special vision, Faeries would be recognised as constantly present in many commonplace locations.

A Welsh story tells of an impoverished widow who finds a baby dumped on her doorstep, with a note asking her to look after the child. There is also a jar of ointment with instructions to apply it daily to his eyes, whilst protecting her own hands with a pair of gloves. The child thrives under the widow's care and she is rewarded with generous gifts of food and clothes. When he is almost one year old, the widow's eye itches and she rubs it with her finger, still wearing the ointment-stained gloves. At once the child transforms into a pale, almost transparent Faery; and by the next morning he has vanished and no more gifts are left for her.

Another widow, this time in Lancashire, becomes distraught when her only daughter develops an incurable infection in her eyes. An ancient gypsy

advises her to bathe the girl's eyes in the enchanted water of the Spring of the Faeries, which they find after a long journey. As the widow splashes the water on her daughter's eyes, a strange man steps from the trees and hands her a small box of green, honeysuckle-scented ointment, which he promises will cure the affliction. Sure enough, within moments of application all the swelling and soreness has gone. They take the ointment home and one evening the widow's own eyes become sore from long hours of sewing by candlelight. She tries the ointment and is likewise cured. However, a few days later she encounters the man again at the market, greets him enthusiastically and ends up partially blinded following the usual ritual in these stories.

For information about Spriggans please see Notes to *The Miser and the Spriggans* story, here.

Flying with the Faeries

This story comes from Herefordshire, but the general theme is common in both English and Scottish Faery lore, whilst the flying element is reminiscent of Ireland's *The King of France's Daughter* (here and here).

A Cornish version tells of a man, Pixy-Led on his way home after a party, who hears his tormentors cry 'Ho and away for the beach!' He repeats the words and finds himself flying after them to the local Squire's cellar, where he helps them steal casks of wine. He too falls into a drunken sleep, is caught the next morning and sentenced to hang; but is then rescued by a Pixy woman shouting: 'Ho and away for France!' He repeats the words, then shoots off the scaffold and vanishes.

Two Scottish variants omit the 'flying' part of the story and concentrate on the last-minute rescue from execution. One tells of a laird accosted by a Faery man on horseback who complains that the laird's sewer drains straight into his own dwelling. The laird quickly apologises and redirects his drains. Years later he is rewarded when the Faery spirits him away from the scaffold as he is about to be hanged for murder. Another, from Ayreshire, features a laird who permits a Faery boy to drain his ale barrel dry when he requests a drink for his sickly mother. Years later, this laird too is rescued from execution by the Faery, who cries:

Ae guid turn deserves anither
Tak ye that for being kind to ma mither.

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